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Adventure

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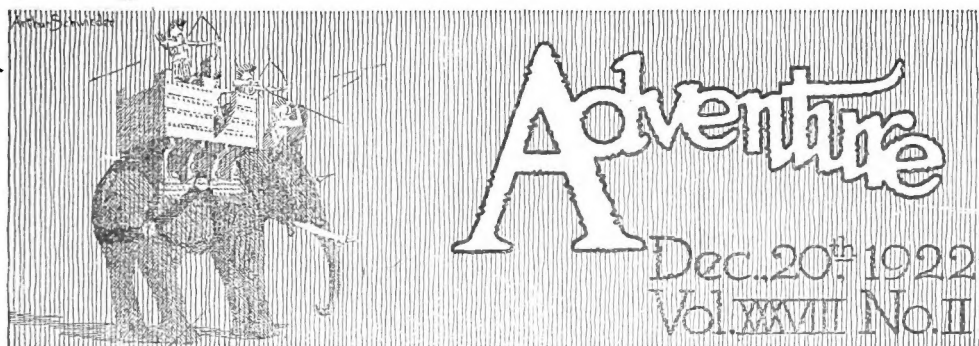
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IN THE eighteenth century the journey from the Atlantic coast into the Far West was a perilous undertaking. The Indians hotly contested the advance of the white man. The English, French and Spanish colonists regarded each other with suspicion and hatred. To gain information for the Governor of New York, *Harry Ormerod*, *Peter Corlaer* and their Indian friend *Tawanears*—all three noted for their exploits on the "Doom Trail"—undertook the trip. "BEYOND THE SUNSET," by Arthur D. Howden Smith, a three-part serial and sequel to "The Doom Trail," starts in the next issue.

"**H**ASHKNIFE" *HARTLEY* and "*Sleepy*" *Stevens* find "*Quinin*" *Quinn* less bitter than his name implies. When the three set out to solve the mystery of the shifted sepulchers they stack up against "*Spot*" *Easton* and the crooked crowd he bosses. "THE RANCH OF THE TOMBSTONES," a novelette by W. C. Tuttle, complete in the next issue.

"**W**ATCH for the crabs when they meet," were the last words of an old beachcomber. And, where the crabs met, *Mathers* and *Painter* found violence and something of greater value than the pearls they had come to seek. "THE TREASURE OF TRINIDAD," a novelette by Albert Richard Wetjen, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

**Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the
10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



Author of "Two Men," "Adventure," etc.

IT WAS past six bells and growing on to noon, and I was a homesick man as I stood on the quay below London Bridge and watched the *King Sagamore* swinging on her hawser out in the tideway. For she was Virginia-owned, and I, George Roberts of Virginia, knew her well, so that the sight of her was like a touch of home to me.

Also, I had a vile headache, and my memory of the previous night's events was very hazy. I had met a number of other captains, and I think some ship-owners, at the Royal Arms, though I could remember only Ned Low and the dark man, Russel, because I liked the one and disliked the other. I seemed to remember that Low had promised his interest to try to get me a ship, or else a chief mate's berth, but I could recall little of what he had said, except that he told some gorgeous yarns of the Guinea trade.

"Good morning, Captain Roberts!" came a voice, and I turned to see Russel himself approaching.

I greeted him without pleasure, for there was a sneer in his eyes, and I did not like his gold-laced hat and jeweled fingers, or the look in his dark face.

"You seem mighty busy," he went on, his heavy-lidded gaze searching me. "The cap'n put you under the table, I hear! Well, what think you of the *King Sagamore*?"

"Out of trim," I responded. "She's down by the head, or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Oh!" said Russel, eying me. "But you're a Virginian, sir—and a seaman to boot! I never heard of seamen coming from Virginia or the other colonies."

This angered me, as it also puzzled me. Why on earth the man should want to pick a quarrel, I could not see. But, knocking

out my pipe and smiling, I obliged him swiftly.

"Plenty you never heard of, I imagine! Particularly here in England."

"Eh?"

He bent his black brows upon me, scowling.

"How mean you?" he added.

"Why, just this: What was your name before you made it Russel?"

At that, his white teeth showed. He clapped hand to belt as if feeling for a pistol, and I laughed at him.

"Aye, try it with a Virginian!" I told him, and chuckled again. "Think you're on the high seas, my bucko? Russel, forsooth! If you're not a Portugee, I don't know my business! Aye, snarl all you please—and ladies' rings to your fingers. You cursed fool, don't you know they hang pirates in London town? How long since you were on the Account, as the gentry of that profession term it?"

That reached him between wind and water, as it were. I really meant to taunt him into action, since I wanted to feel my fist in his dark face; but I went too far. His hands dropped. He stood motionless, his eyes eating into me, and they become bloodshot.

"On the Account!" he repeated the phrase, a thickness in his voice. "You speak glibly of it! Perhaps you've been on the Account yourself, my fine Virginia sailor?"

"Why, perhaps I have," said I cheerfully. "And what of it?"

He looked at me for another moment, then turned on his heel and strode away very swiftly, as one who goes of set purpose. I looked after him, frowning. He had been at the tavern with Captain Low the previous night. Ned Low was an engaging rascal of the sort that men love, had been master of a Guineaman, and had traded at the Indies. Russel was of a very different stripe; a sinister man, certainly no Englishman, and I wondered that Ned Low would keep company with him.

However, I dismissed the matter, filled my pipe afresh and turned to watch the ship out in the stream. She was making ready to sail, and to a seaman's eye she presented some uncommonly interesting aspects.

That homesick feeling grew on me as I looked. My first voyage had been made in her, under old Andrew Scott—a cold and

hard master he was, too! Any one who had sailed with Scott had tales to brag of. But Cap'n Scott was dead and gone these two years, thanks to a drinking bout with Sandy Fisher aboard the *Margaret* at Barbadoes; for Sandy craftily mixed some rare claret in the rum, and Cap'n Scott never rose from under the table.

Well, Scott was dead, and here was I a captain, and yonder the old *King Sagamore*! Heartily did I wish that I were commanding her or at least aboard of her, since I was down to my last guinea, with no hope of a ship except I took out a slaver, for which I had no stomach.

Gossip along the quay told me that she was bound for Virginia, but I doubted this. She was in ballast, and no ship went to Virginia in ballast these days. Also she had bent a new suit of canvas and was fresh-varnished; and I, knowing how stingy were her owners, realized that this was something like a miracle.

What was more, I perceived a feather-bed being put aboard her from the lighter alongside. A feather-bed, indeed! No wonder all the Thames boatmean jeered her as they passed, and the crew of a fishing-lugger tied at the quay began to bawl comments which set the river in a roar of laughter. I wondered who was going to use that feather-bed.

One can not deny that the *King Sagamore* has a certain roll to her in the best of seas; an uneasy and fretful roll, as if endeavoring to shake loose of the bloodstains that have sunk into her teak. Even old Cap'n Scott had groaned and left the deck at times.

Just now I heard a voice calling out:

"There 'e be, sir! That's 'im a-smoking of the 'bacca!"

I glanced about, to see a quay loafer pointing me out to a gentleman approaching rapidly. I faced about to meet this stranger in some surprise.

He was a man in a hurry; a small fellow of forty-odd, wizened and thin in the cheeks, his eyes very sparkling. From his heaving chest and awry wig, he had lately been running. As he strode up to me he produced a snuff-box with a great air of grandeur.

"Your pardon, sir," he addressed me, his words rapid and with authority. "You are Captain Roberts, the Virginian?"

"I am," was my response.

"My name is Dennis Langton, merchant and goldsmith, living at the Wheatsheaf in Lombard Street. I had word this morning from Low that you'd be sailing with us."

He rattled this all out in a breath. Then he flung a glance over his shoulder and suddenly thrust the snuff-box at me.

"Here, take this and fetch it aboard wi' you—move sharp now! Tell Ned that I'll come aboard as he drops down-stream. Give it to him and no other. With you this side Gravesend— Devil sink me! The dogs have caught the trail—hide it, lad——"

Leaving the snuff-box hidden in my fist, the spry little man darted away from me and ran for cover like a hunted rabbit. I gaped after him, thinking him a madman until the burst of shouts went up from the running men.

"Stop thief!" went up the yells, shrill and sharp with the hunting fever. "Escapel! Trip him up—'scape! 'Prentices out—stop thief—king's name! Pirate and thief——"

Upon and past me swept a shrilling throng in a mad rush, two constables in the lead. Langton vanished in among the buildings, and they after him, and the chorus of yells was swiftly drowned in the noise of the city.

I stood there staring after the rout, until the whimsicality of it all drew a laugh from me. The swift change from the pompous manner and address to the wild flight was ludicrous. The incident was strange and unreal—a merchant of Lombard Street pursued as thief and pirate!

Pirate! Dennis Langton! Suddenly the name flashed across my consciousness and startled me. Three years previously, or rather four, since it was early in 1720, I was mate aboard the ship *Susannah*, owned by a merchant of Southwark Side, near London. There had been much talk aboard her of how she had fallen prey to a brace of pirates near Maderia last voyage and had later escaped. Spriggs was one of the rovers, the same who was lately hanged at Tyburn and still hangs there.

And the other one— Now the name came back to me clear enough! Langton, and none other; Dennis Langton, a soft-spoken man, who was reputed to have murdered many with his own hand.

Could the pirate Langton be the same man as this merchant and goldsmith? Most

unlikely, and yet all things are possible in this world!

Now came suspicion that he had stolen the snuff-box which he forced on me, and that I might be taken for a thief. This vanished when I opened my hand. The box was a small one of black wood, absolutely worthless. Nor had the little man the look of a cut-purse.

And what was it he had said about Captain Low? A message for Low, too. And what was that about my shipping with Low? I felt bewildered.

Thrusting the snuff-box into my pocket, I drew again on my pipe, frowning over this singular incident. I was still turning it over in my mind perplexedly, when there arose a new and more singular matter which drove it completely out of my head; and no wonder!

Hearing my name called, I looked around to see Captain Low himself coming toward me, bravely puffing at a pipe and laughing to himself over some inward joke.

"Ha, Roberts! A fine morning to you, George! — me, but we had a pretty rouse last night! Why are you standing thus idle in the market place?"

"Why, for lack of work!"

Smiling, I gave him a grip of the hand.

"It seems to me that you said something about looking you up today—but I confess that last rum punch we brewed put a stopper on my brain! Sink me if I can remember a thing."

"What!"

Low gave me a singular yet whimsical look.

"Come, lad! You don't mean to say that you can't remember our discussion?"

"Not a thing," I said ruefully. "I've lost even the name of your ship, Ned!"

He broke into a roar of laughter, dropped his pipe and smashed it, roared again, then clapped me heartily on the shoulder and swung me about.

"There she lies, Roberts. — me, this is a creamy jest! Wow! Wait until I tell John Russel about this! And you entered with me as chief mate, too! Oh, lad, ha' pity on me! Yonder's the *King Sagamore* with poor Gunner Basil loading the last aboard; and me sleeping abed all morning thinking you stood on her deck!"

"Good Lord!" I stammered. "D'you mean to say that I, George Roberts, shipped as chief mate with you——"

He fell to roaring again with laughter, and I chimed in, helpless to withstand it. We stood there like two fools, holding our sides and sending up shouts of mirth that drew curious folk about to stare and wonder if we were loose from Bedlam.

At length I came out of the fit of laughter, and we walked apart down the quay, discussing matters. When I told Low how I had been homesick for the *King Sagamore*, he began to bellow again.

His news struck me with incredulity, but a glad man I was for the carouse of the night before, since I appeared to have landed a good berth with a man I liked. Ned Low was fully as tall as I, and even wider in the shoulder; a lean man, his face brown and hard as if carved from mahogany, but ever ready to slip into the cheeriest laughter man ever heard. He had a whimsical touch about him, and I think had run away from Oxford for love of the sea, since he could quote the classics by the hour and spoke sometimes of Magdalen Towers.

Well, he speedily made it clear to me that I was signed with him, and that he had all morning supposed me to be aboard, at which we laughed again.

"Russel came back and dragged me from table just as I was sitting down to breakfast with word that you were standing on the quay like a man in a dream," he concluded with a final chuckle. "So I came along to see——"

"Russel!" I said, and frowned. "Does he sail with us?"

"Aye."

Low took my arm frankly and turned me eye to eye with him.

"Listen, Roberts! We've scant time to talk—I must get aboard and see to things. But you're a man after my own heart; I drank you under the table last night to make certain, since rum brings out the worst of a man!

"I know you and Russel must fall out. That's as it should be; but look out that Russel doesn't slip a knife into you. Understand? I have to take him as second mate, willy-nilly, and as we explained last night— Well, run along and get your things, and don't miss the tide on your life! I must aboard."

He turned, calling to a wherry just leaving the landing-stairs and made her with a swift run and a leap. I marveled at his cat-

like agility, responded to his wave of the hand, and turned to seek my own clothes at the Hare and Hounds, fortunately close by.



FOR all that I was a happy-go-lucky young devil this morning's affair left me in somewhat of a daze. Or perhaps the rum punch contributed to that effect. However, I was gradually coming to an understanding of things. Russel had come up to me in an evil humor, thinking that I was shirking my duty by loafing ashore; which would well account for his attitude.

Not until I had nearly reached my lodgings did I recall that extraordinary meeting with the man Dennis Langton, and clapped hand to pocket with an exclamation. I had clear forgotten to speak of him to Ned Low!

However, no matter now. It was evident that he must have seen Low that morning, or have heard from him that I was in charge of the ship.

I packed my trunk and stepped in to the ordinary to pay off my landlord. Just then a number of men came crowding in with much high talk, amid which I caught the name of Langton. At that I turned and listened, while the landlord gaped likewise.

"And to think that Langton has all this while been a merchant in Lombard Street!" cried one man with a volley of oaths. "A pretty pass we're coming to in London town!"

"They say," chimed in another, "that he has already sold out his business and was in shape to skip the city——"

"All by accident he was betrayed," spoke up another, a late comer. "You've not heard? Zounds, a ripping story! In Lombard Street itself, only this morning, gentlemen! He came face to face with a shipman whom he'd plundered years ago, was recognized, dodged the hue and cry and broke clear away. Now the constables are searching the city for him, and the waterside as well. A pirate at loose—zounds!"

I paid my score, engaged a man to carry down the trunk and went my way somewhat thoughtfully.

This Dennis Langton, known for a pirate, was a friend of Low and was hoping to get aboard the *King Sagamore*. I was going as mate aboard that ship. So was John Russel; and my words had stung Russel that morning. Russel like Langton, had been

on the Account, as those who take to piracy term the profession.

What about Ned Low? He was one of them; no use shirking the fact. This fine Virginia ship was going a-sailing on a mighty queer cruise, in ballast at that!

And what about me, George Roberts of Virginia?

Why, that was simple enough! Duty lay clear and straight before me—inform the authorities, have every one aboard the *King Sagamore* laid by the heels, and become a popular hero! The ship would be saved to its owners and everybody happy.

Against this there balanced Ned Low's frank and keen blue eyes, the clap of his hand on my shoulder, the comradely liking I bore him. Aye, because I liked him I laughed at duty! Besides I was never a great hand at informing. If I want a thing done, I go do it; this running to catch-polls and constables is not to my mind.

So we came down again to the quay, and as I pocketed my pipe my hand touched the black snuff-box. I drew out the thing and looked at it, pressed the catch and opened it. Inside there was no snuff, but a folded, bone-hard bit of vellum. I put the thing away once more.

"Let sleeping dogs lie!" I reflected. "Dennis Langton may be caught. If he's been posing as a merchant here in London, he'll be well known and should be caught in an hour's time. That may simplify matters a bit.

"As for Ned Low, I trust him more than a little, and he should have sense enough to know that I'm not going on the Account. Perhaps that's not his own intention, either! I may be wronging him."

I called a wherry and was taken out toward the ship. As we approached her I fell to laughing again; for I had not the least notion whither she was bound or on what errand. And I remembered that feather-bed going aboard, so that the whole affair struck me afresh with such whimsical humor that I could not refrain from laughing. Captain Low looked over the rail as we drew near, and he caught the infection and began to roar again with mirth, and was still grinning as I came over the side.

"Welcome!" he cried, and struck hands again, a hearty grip. "What's so merry?"

"Why, I can't remember where we are bound for," I said. "Guinea or the plantations?"

"It wasn't mentioned," and Low chuckled. "The Verde Islands, if you want to know, and then Barbados or elsewhere."

"Then we stow salt at the islands, do we?"

Low glanced around, saw that we were alone and gave me a straight look.

"Nay, Roberts—we stow gold! Art satisfied? And not on the Account neither."

I nodded, and once again forgot about Dennis Langton's message.

II



AFTER stowing my duffel away in one of the stern cabins I came on deck again and inspected things. Captain Low had everything shipshape, and now there was little to do save to await the tide. Russel had not come aboard as yet, either.

Truly a sweet ship was the *King Sagamore*! Built originally for the India trade, she had much of the black teak in her making, and this was ever kept oiled and waxed, in neat contrast to her white deck and varnished spars and the new canvas stowed aloft. At her bow the torso of a feathered savage was set for figurehead; glass eyes the sagamore had in his painted visage, and I have heard said that the evil eye was entered into him.

The men were clumped in groups forward. And to my disgust one of them was standing on the rail, exhorting several around him with a voice of wild fervor; a tall, thin man, hair flying in the wind, cheeks like yellow parchment and a godly eye. Gunner Basil was this, who had a true preaching whine to his Puritan voice.

"No place for you, gunner!" I said when I understood who he was. "Get you aft!"

He rolled his eyes at me and shook his head.

"Nay, nay, sir! It is time that one officer of this ungodly heathen vessel should be able to think for the souls o' these poor men!"

"Your argument may be sound, gunner," I said, "but you had best learn that your place is to obey first and argue later."

With which I clipped him under the ear and took his place at the rail.

"Douse him with a bucket, lads," I said to the men, "and look alive! Where's the bosun? Ah! — me if it isn't Bosun Pilcher out of the *Merry Thought*! Bose, remember our voyage in the Guineaman, do

you? Glad to find you here, old friend. Watches made up, are they? All taut?"

"Aye, sir, all taut," and Pilcher grinned. A savage brown fellow he was, with golden earrings dangling against his cheeks; short and squat, powerful of build, he was worth a dozen men in a pinch.

"What are these preachers we have aboard, bosc?" I demanded, looking at the men who stood about. A long-haired lot, with sanctimonious faces and rolling eyes.

"Puritans," said Pilcher, and spat over the rail. "— if they ain't, sir! It was Mr. Langton shipped the lot. I said 'twas no luck to let a crew be shipped by a Lombard Street merchant, nor is it. Not an oath all mornin', and us a-working like blacks!"

The crew shipped by Langton! I whistled at that. Obviously no one aboard knew anything about Langton's adventures of the morning. Leaving my perch, I took Pilcher's arm and led him forward into the bows, where we might have a quiet word.

"What's this, bosc?" I asked. "Say no word of it, but the merchant Langton is being hunted through the city for a pirate. Russel has been on the Account, or I'm a liar! And I'm not so sure about the master——"

"Cap'n Low is the bloodiest of the lot," said Pilcher gloomily. "I'm not s'prized to hear about Langton; not me! Low was piratin' around Madagascar last year. Oh, I'm a wise man, I am! But nobody aboard knows it, d'ye mind, sir! If 'twas not for what we've got stowed aft I'd ha' jumped ship."

"Eh?"

I stared at him.

"What's stowed aft, then?" I asked.

He gave me a grin.

"Oh, you don't know, sir? Well, I'll not tell ye. Why Langton went and shipped these here psalm-whining fish I don't know, but that bleedin' Gunner Basil ain't the soapy fool he looks nor acts, Mr. Roberts! You and me are honest men, and the score up for'ard are honest fools; but Gunner Basil ain't one or t'other. D'ye know where I heard tell of him? Far and away it was, last v'yage——"

We leaned against the rail, filled and lighted our pipes, and Bosun Pilcher told me what he knew about our zealous gunner. It was worth the telling.

"D'ye mind, sir, last v'yage 'twas in a Bristol brigantine, to Madeira and the Verde Islands, and back with wine and salt, and a weary time it was, for she leaked like a sieve all the while. We hove out o' Funchal and made for the Isle o' Sal to take our salt aboard, that was in the making; and got safe into the north end of Palmera Roads, and anchored with the palm-trees east-and-by-north, in that spot o' clear sand bottom, five fathom.

"A man came off to us, a white man, marooned there, he had been, by a Frenchman named Maring or some such name, a pirate it was. He told us of a great fight there had been aboard o' the Frenchy six months back, and how there was a famous gunner aboard of her, a gunner by the name o' Basil, full of all pirate learning and a very law-shark for all them that were on the Account. And he said the Frenchy had shot off the lobe of this gunner's ear with a pistol and had set him ashore, all from some dispute over a woman.

"And sink me if this here preacher ain't the identical scoundrel, sir! You look at his ear, and there it be.

"Well, that's not the whole of it neither. This chap told us a long story, which I disremember in the main; but 'twas all about this here Gunner Basil and some wild tale that lay along of he. D'ye mind the pirate Avery? Gunner Basil had sailed with him, and talked in his cups about Avery's treasure that lay buried at one of the Verde Islands; he knew where the place was, and there be not another living man knew of it, and he was all for going after it. A wild tale enough!"

"Wild, but it might hold truth," I commented. "Avery burned down one of the towns in those islands, and cruised about there. However, what matter to us? This Gunner Basil, you think, is pretending to be a preaching Puritan just now?"

"Aye, to save his neck, belike."

Pilcher shook his earrings.

"Folks do call me a pirate because I wear hoops, and have a roll to my legs on dry land, and have use for an honest oath or two; but zounds! You know me, Master Roberts. I had liefer be me than this cutthroat devil of a Gunner Basil, with his Scripture and Psalms and whine!"

I had to laugh at this, which was true enough. Bosun Pilcher had the looks of a pirate and the life of an honest man; a wife

and six children in Jamestown, and a sober, careful record. Gunner Basil, on the other hand, with all the earmarks of a fanatical blue-nosed Puritan, was by repute a devil on the leash.

"Well, bosc," I said, knocking out my pipe, "keep a close tongue and wait for what turns up. You'd best look over the capstan and hawse and be ready to up anchor. Tide's almost at the turn, and I see a boat yonder with Mr. Russel coming aboard."

I turned and started aft, having now remembered something mighty important. As I went I encountered Gunner Basil, who touched his forelock to me as I passed and made no comment on my lesson in obedience. Russel's boat was hailing us, and at the break of the poop I found Captain Low waiting for me. I was up the ladder and had him by the arm, fumbling in my pocket.

"Ha, cap'n! I met a friend of yours ashore, and he charged me with word for you——"

Before I could say more, Russel was over the rail and leaping up to us, his dark face all ablaze with fury and excitement.

"The word's out after Dennis!" he cried, but low-voiced that the men might not hear. "Devil's luck, Ned, devil's luck! Some fool recognized him this morning; put the catch-polls after him! Zounds, if we don't get up the hook and into the Channel they'll twig the whole affair! Up and away, I tell you!"

Ned Low flung a glance at the after companion. His eyes were suddenly stricken.

"—— me, this is bad news!" he murmured. "And at the last minute!"

"Up and away!" snarled Russel, still panting.

"No, no, I'll not run and leave him!" exclaimed Low warmly; but I intervened.

"Langton isn't nabbed, and won't be," I said, coolly enough, while they stared at me. "I met him ashore, and he had time to give me a message for you, cap'n before the constables set him running afresh. Said for you to drop down-stream with the tide, and he'd come aboard—this side Gravesend, most likely."

"Good!" cried Low.

He snapped erect as if this news had put fresh life into him, and his smile leaped out once more.

"Trust Dennis to come clear! Mr. Russel, be ready to shake out those topsails in five minutes; the tide's nearly at the turn. Mr. Roberts, take charge for'ard and see the anchor's well stowed."

Russel gave me one look that was like a stab; then his white teeth flashed in a laugh.

"So you know Langton, Mr. Roberts!" he said, and nodded. "Good enough. We'll pull together after all."

Oddly, it seemed that his ill will toward me had vanished; this was all seeming, however, because he thought that I was a friend of Langton, and bore this latter some well-founded fear. He was soon enough snarling again.

I went forward while the bosun's whistle shrilled and the men jumped to stations. Everything was shipshape; the men began to stamp about the windlass, capstan bars of dark teak all ashine in the sun, pawls clinking as the ship walked up on her hook, and the canvas aloft beginning to loose. A sweet ship was the *King Sagamore*! Every little detail of her was sweet and natty. Even the fife-rail was of red teak, and the belaying pins of black, heavy as iron.

Now she leaned over to wind and tide and began to slip through the water, while Cap'n Low himself conned her through the river traffic; six bells was struck from the brass bell, and I minded the cabin-boy struck them; a slim lad, a guttersnipe of the town, his face pinched and marked with deviltry beyond the ken of most men.

And I noted an odd enough thing. Shoving on the black capstan bars of teak, or hauling on the lines, there was no singing from those men of ours. Instead, not a sound from them until we were bracing the yards a bit, and then one long-nosed rascal began to chant out a psalm, in which they all joined. —— me, but I can still hear the roar of mirth that went up as a barge passed us and caught the words!

I sent the gunner down to see that all the ports were closed; she carried four guns to a side and six patteroes—a well-armed jade! Or, should I say, warrior? The matter of sex is all a jumble when it comes to the *King Sagamore*. Pocahontas would have been a better name for her. This psalm-singing was too much for me, however.

"Belay that singing!" I ordered at length. "Bosc, pipe 'em the old bowline! Join in

you Newgate rascals, or you'll taste trouble!"

So presently Pilcher led them, and the voice of Gunner Basil boomed up the words from below, and the rascals stamped the deck to a right tune:

"Oh, haul upon the bowline, the fore and maintop bowline!

Oh, haul upon the bowline—the bowline, haul!"

And so we had everything snugged down for the present, and I joined Cap'n Low on the quarterdeck, while Russel and the gunner stood at the rail, watching the river-banks slide past us. Now I went up to Low, who stood at the wheel, and spoke to him softly.

"Ned, I said nothing of it before Russel, but Dennis Langton gave me more than a word for you. Hold out your hand and take the little box."

He dropped a hand to his side, and I put the little black snuff-box into it; and, not taking his eyes from the water ahead, he nodded.

"Good, Roberts!" he said quietly. "So Dennis is playing fair with us, eh? Fine. Ah! Look there, behind those fishing-smacks—is that a boat? Here take my glass."

I took the spyglass from his pocket and leveled it.

"Aye! Two oarsmen and Langton himself in the stern. Now they've seen us——"

"Stand by with a line, Russell!" cried out Low. "Roberts, stand by those braces and be ready. We'll pick him up on the jump."

Pick him up we did, nigh swamping the wherry in the attempt. Langton came up and over the rail, nimble as a cat; but he had not been on the escape for nothing, since his clothes were torn and muddied and his wig clean gone, leaving him bald and shiny.

Nor was this all; for no sooner was he on deck than he staggered and collapsed into the arms of Russel with a choked cry, and I glimpsed a smear of blood across the mate's shoulder. Ned Low saw it too, for he turned to me with a quiet word.

"Habe! Lead in the lungs, and that's one of us gone to ——. Crack on all sail, Mr. Roberts! I leave the deck to you. Get us out o' this cursed water and to sea before they send a man-o'-war to stop us. This is a sad business—the poor girl!"

What he meant by this last, I had no idea, for I was already calling all hands, and Pilcher piped the men to the weather braces and aloft on the instant. Russel and Ned Low carried the figure of Langton to the quarter-deck, and I saw nothing more of them for the time, being mighty busy alow and aloft. Gunner Basil I sent to the helm, needing a good man there if we were to race out of the river. The sails were loosed already, and the men piping down from aloft.

"Haul aboard! Get your tack well down, bosc! Tend braces, you lads—set taut! Sheet home—sheet home and hoist away, there! Lead along and man the flying-jib halyards—clear away the downhaul—hoist! All hands main braces——"

So it went, with Pilcher's pipe whistling shrill and the canvas fluttering out. Much to my surprize I perceived that these long-nosed dissenters forward were good enough seamen; and in no long time we were bowling away for dear life, our new canvas straining in the wind and Gunner Basil handling helm in sweet fashion.

Then, with all clear, I turned to the quarter-deck—and stood thunderstruck.



RUSSEL, sitting under the weather rail, held the head of Dennis Langton in his arms, while Ned Low knelt beside and talked to Langton, who was coughing blood. The man had a bullet through the body, and it needed no surgeon to know that his hours were numbered. It was not this, however, that held me transfixed, but the person kneeling over Langton's hand; for this was a woman!

She had come from the after cabins obviously; a straight, slim slip of a thing all yellow golden hair and sober gray gown and long hands. Her face I could not see, but judged that she was young.

A flutter aloft caused me to look at the helmsman. Gunner Basil was staring at the scene, and being down the wind was probably hearing their words. With an angry shout I leaped to the wheel, shoved him away and ordered him to take charge forward. He went, but with a sour snarl in his yellow parchment face.

Indeed, standing in the wheel-box I found that the wind brought me snatches of talk from the group. The girl was sobbing, and Dennis Langton was speaking to her between his terrible coughs. The words reached to me clearly.

Even as I listened, even as I felt the ship with the wheel and held her in the wind, even as I watched shore and opening river-mouth, I was aware of Gunner Basil and that devil-eyed little cabin-boy, talking together near the foot of the main; and I wondered vaguely of what they were speaking.

"Keep it, Polly!" came Langton's gasping voice. "All for you—swear—promise me!"

The girl sobbed out something. Without looking at him I was aware that Langton's head lifted, and his eyes leaped to Ned Low.

"Ned, Ned! You'll not take it from her? Aye, you were always on the level—met on the level with us, parted on the square—Ho there, Tyler! Out sword, Tyler; run the knave through! — your eyes, Tyler, you missed him! Netting's up and we can't board——"

For a moment he raved, then fell suddenly silent, gasping and sobbing for breath, coughing up the black blood. I stole a glance, and his face was white as beech-ash.

"Call Russel, Ned!" came his voice again. "Where's Russel; John Lopez that was, John Russel that is now?"

"I'm here, Dennis," said the dark mate, bending over so that Langton knew him.

"Swear to me then," gasped the latter. "Swear you'll give my share to Polly—swear you'll be true to her, not cheat her—swear!"

"Aye," said Russel, whose real name seemed to be Lopez. "I swear it, Dennis, and take the cap'n to witness!"

"Swear it, Ned!" cried out Langton, looking up.

Ned Low, his face set and mournful, inclined his head.

"I'll be true to you and her, Dennis, and will protect her, so help me! I swear it by the oath that you and I know—the oath of the book and compass and word!"

"Where's Roberts, the Virginian?" Langton's head lifted.

"Call him! Good man, Roberts; true man—stand by him, Ned! I liked that man. Call him—swear him——"

Ned Low strode over to me.

"Give me the helm, and go to him. Quick, man, before he passes!"

I obeyed. Although I was in the dark as to this oath, it appeared honest enough and would soothe the passing of a dying man. As I knelt before Langton, recogni-

tion came into his eyes, fighting the fear of death that was filling them.

"Swear, Virginian!" he panted out. "Stand wi' Polly—her share——"

"I swear, Dennis Langton," was my response.

His head dropped back, and a cry came from the girl's throat—then, with a furious and frightful effort, Dennis Langton swept Polly aside, wrenched himself to his feet, swayed there and shook his fist toward London. Laughter and blood came from his lips, and one last wild cry.

"Cheated you, Jack Ketch—cheated you first and last, Tyburn Tree! Sink me to — if I haven't the laugh o' you after all! Zounds!"

He rattled on the word, and died, and pitched forward with a laugh terrible on his lips. Thus passed the first of our company aboard the *King Sagamore*; and as I watched Russel take the weeping girl to the companionway I wondered to what oath I had sworn myself, in the hand of a dying pirate!

III



WHILE we pitched and rolled down-Channel that night I was below with Ned Low, seeing that Dennis Langton was properly sewed up for burial. Gunner Basil brought a shot for his feet and then, touching his forelock, respectfully enough addressed us; in the light of the swinging lantern his parchmenty face looked more yellow and wolfish than ever.

"Beg pardon, masters, but who's a-goin' to say the prayer over him?" he asked.

"I am."

Ned Low glanced up.

"Why?"

"It ain't fittin', sir," protested the gunner with an air of earnest, stubborn conviction.

His pale, deadly eyes were fastened upon Low.

"He died in sin, most like, but it ain't fittin' for you to say no prayer, sir. It's the spirit movin' me to protest."

Ned Low straightened up.

"Now, sink me! I'm master o' this ship——"

"We that has a higher hope don't hold wi' no blasphemy; beg pardon, master, what be you but an ungodly, unregenerate sinner? Blasphemy it is, no less. More'n one of us aboard ha' heard tell o' 'Bloody Ned,' cap'n. Tha' ain't here nor there; but

when it comes to sayin' prayers, I speaks up! It's the spirit movin' in me——"

Bloody Ned! Well, there it was, like a slap in the face. I had heard of Bloody Ned, too, but had not connected the name with my good friend Captain Ned Low.

For a moment I thought Ned would strike the man down. Eyes clenched with eyes, and in the obscurity behind Gunner Basil I perceived more than one dark figure lurking. Then in time I recalled the tale that Bosun Pilcher had told me, and pushed forward with a nudge in Low's ribs.

"What's all this?" I demanded. "This is fine talk from you, Basil, who were on the Account with Avery and served as his gunner! And what about that French pirate you sailed with—the one who pistoled you and marooned you after the big fight, eh?"

There was dead silence, broken only by the groan of stanchions and the creak of blocks. My knowledge of his past took Gunner Basil all aback; he gaped at me from a livid and stricken face. Ned Low uttered a soft oath of astonishment. A murmur began to rise from the listening men. I struck again while the iron was hot.

"A prayer would come with ill grace from you, gunner—as lief from Bloody Ned as from Avery's gunner, if I'm the victim! Who was it nicked the lobe off that ear of yours with a pistol ball, eh?"

Gunner Basil staggered again at that thrust. I felt a swift stab of fear as I met those pale eyes of his; then he began to shake his long head and whine.

"When a man repenteth him of the evil and turns to godliness, the scornful make mock of him! Aye, sir, you ha' the right of it; a sinful man I ha' been, and taken part wi' men o' blood. And now that regeneration ha' come upon me, by the works o' the blessed Tom Deveney o' Houndsditch——"

"Regeneration your eye, ye —— lousy swab of a liar!" broke in a roar, and Bosun Pilcher lurched forward. "Who was it a-throwin' oaths so free and fine but a half-hour ago? You, ye scabby sojer, thinkin' no one was by to hear! Now out knife if ye dare, and I'll show ye summat——"

It looked like blows and hot breath, for Pilcher had hand on knife and Gunner Basil was clutching under his arm; but Ned Low stepped forward and stood between the two men and reasserted his command.

"—— me, d'ye think we're on the

Account, to settle quarrels wi' the steel!" he cried out. "Out o' this, bosel! You, gunner, give me no more of your sanctimonious lip, d'ye hear? You'll taste a dozen of the cat next time. Get this boy made ready, and five bells in morning watch call all hands for burial. Mr. Roberts, it's hard on eight bells—you'd better step up and stand by to take the deck from Mr. Russel."

"From Portugee Lopez, ye mean," shot a voice out of the shadows. "Lopez, the bloody pirate what scuppered three Deal craft last year!"

"Who was that?" snapped Ned Low, hand dropping to belt. "Out of the dark, you rat! Who was it?"

None answered him, however, and the darkness proved empty to the swing of a lantern. So I went on deck again, wondering not a little. That voice had held an odd twang, not unlike the tones of the impish cabin-boy, but that was impossible. The child stood in deadly fear of us all and was seasick to boot.

With a fair wind, ballast trimmed anew and one of our brawny dissenters at the helm, we bore down-Channel into the darkness; while I, after lighting my pipe in the lee of the pilot-house, reflected a while upon my situation. It might have been worse, what I knew of it, and it might assuredly have been bettered. Certain outstanding things looked dark.

One certainty was that in London town I had run foul of three fine rogues, and like a blockhead had been hooked. Langton's end spoke for itself. Russel, or Portuguese Lopez, obviously had something of a reputation as a pirate. Of Bloody Ned I had heard, and was grieved to find it was my own Ned Low, the man whom I so liked. As to the girl Polly, I had not seen or heard of her again, but she seemed to be some relation to Langton.

Why had these three men outfitted and chartered—as they must have done—the *King Sagamore*? To get gold from the Cape Verde Islands, Ned Low had said.

All very fine; but how? There was the puzzler. They had not meant to run away with her and go on the Account.

Langton in his capacity as a city merchant had probably given bonds for her, and he had most certainly picked the crew himself. These men were godly rogues, and I did not like them in the least—but they were honest men. Langton would never

have picked such a crew to ship as pirates.

Then again there was the question of Gunner Basil. Captain Low had been utterly astounded at learning the gunner's record; he had known nothing of it. Ergo, Dennis Langton had known nothing of it and had shipped the gunner at face value.

But why the — had Gunner Basil shipped aboard us? I took no stock in his "regeneration"—one look in the man's eyes clapped a stopper on all that. He could fool the men up forward, but he could not fool me, much less Bosun Pilcher.

And what was that oath I had taken? It disquieted me.



I HAD reached this point, and two bells had just been struck, when the tall figure of Ned Low approached.

He glanced at the compass, lighted his pipe, then took my arm and led me to the lee rail, where we could speak without being overheard.

"Roberts, I've been talking with John Russel, and I'm worried," he said frankly and bluntly. "This morning, standing on the quay, you as good as told Russel you'd been on the Account yourself. Tonight you flashed some information on Gunner Basil that staggered him—and me with him. How came you to know it, lad? If you've lied to me, then let's have it out sharp and quick, and reach an understanding."

This was a stiff jolt, and I let him know it.

"About Russel, that was said in jest, to taunt him. As to the rest, Ned—well, I learned tonight that you are Bloody Ned. It grieved me, but I didn't come running and whining to ask if the news was true. Zounds! If I'm such a fool that I can't read a man's eye for true or false, it's a queer thing. And I'll stick by my guns, swing me if I don't!"

Low caught my hand and gripped it hard.

"Spoken like a man, George Roberts!" he said warmly. "Aye, and with a bitter back to the words that I deserve! Your pardon, lad. We'll have a meeting in the cabin tomorrow morning after breakfast, all four of us, and you'll know then why I'm anxious."

"Who's the fourth, then?" I asked.

"Polly Langton, niece and heir of poor Dennis. That was a stiff loss to us, George! Dennis had a head worth any two going."

"He'd not much when he shipped our gunner," I said acidly.

Ned Low whistled.

"Perchance. But the scoundrel may ha' told truth after all, lad; there's a chance of that, d'ye mind! Men have reformed ere this, and will again. Why, look at me, myself!"

He was silent for a moment, then took me across the deck again and under the weather rail, where we sat down in comfort. I think he had been much moved by my challenging answer to his doubts; at least he spoke with a refinement and feeling in his voice that I had not previously heard.

"Roberts, y'have never seen or heard, I suppose, of a man calling himself Trunnel Toby, having a long face like a horse, and sad eyes, and a gold ring in his nostrils, and the likeness of a bleeding heart tattooed upon his breast, just above his own heart?"

"Not I," was my answer.

"I have sought that man going on five years," said Ned Low. "Once I knew that his ship lay in Carlisle Bay, and I sighted her plain; but there was a gale blowing, and we were short of men, and before we could hand the small sails and luff for the bay we were driven past, and the gale held us, and when I came back again he was gone. Oh, but I ha' tried with heart and soul to find that man, all up and down the dark bowl of the sea!"

"And once I was within an hour of him. At Madagascar that was; aye, missed him by a scant sixty minutes, though I caught three of his men left behind, and hanged them! He had heard of Bloody Ned, and he ran for it. And off the Zanzibar coast I met a ship that had spoke him two days before, and north we ran and passed him in a hurricane, and he came over to the Brazils for fear o' me. Now and again, and every way, I found men who had sailed with him, men who had partnered or traded with him, and I hanged them all as I came on them."

"But I never found Trunnel Toby, and ha' lost hope of finding the man now, so I am off to recoup my wasted fortune again, and search some more. The last o' my guineas are in this ship, Roberts; and a big sum from poor Langton, and a share from John Russel. And I am afraid to ask Gunner Basil if he knew the man, for if he did I would hang him, and we have need of a gunner aboard. Besides the man may have reformed, as he says; I'd put it past no man to turn righteous."

"For look you, George! There is a reason

behind all of us. Aye, there's a reason back of each man who dares this wine-dark sea and listens to the rigging as it sings the slumbering song o' night up above! Lord knows I've earned the name of Bloody Ned, earned it with hangings of men alow and aloft—but all of them men who had known Trunnel Toby, d'ye mind that!

"And I've naught to repent of at all, either. I've touched no man's life but for this cause; I've touched no man's money but mine own, honestly made.

"And poor Langton, to whom that gunner laid his tongue, had become an honest man. D'ye know why, George? Because of the girl down below, his niece Polly; and she's a rare lass, I tell you! Bred of the Devon blood, she is, and can hand sail with any man or read the card or steer by the wind. So when I came and said that I was for the gold and had given up the search for Trunnel Toby until we had the guineas again, Langton knew it was an honest word and came in with me; and John Russel made up the sum we lacked, and we bought this ship, George."

"Bought her!" I said in some wonder, for that would have taken round money.

"Aye, just so. A company venture for the gold. We'll have it again soon enough, and then I'll buy out the other shares and keep the *King Sagamore* and go again after Trunnel Toby. Sure y'have never heard of the man?"

"Never," I said. "But there's Bosun Pilcher come to look at the helm; call him, for many a thing he has heard and seen, and an honest man to boot."

Ned Low lifted his voice, and the dark shadow of bosc detached itself from the pilot-box and came over to us on the sloping deck. So there Ned Low asked his question again, and described the man he sought. Bose turned the quid in his mouth and chewed upon it and spat over the stern rail, and then made careful answer.

"Why, sir, there be many a man wi' face like a horse, and one or two aboard here, but not that man. Seems like I've heard tell of he, too; let's see now—was it aboard the *Merry Thought*? No, 'twas not; yet 'twas not so long ago—

"Hal — my eyes, sir, if 'twas not two v'yages back, on the *Pricket* brigantine, wi' Cap'n Baxter out o' Bristol town! I mind it well enough now. We were lying at Lisbon, and a supra-cargo there was tellin' me

of such a man, bleedin' heart and all! Mate on a London trading-brig, he was, and had got into trouble wi' the Portugee folk, and had skipped between two days. That's where I heard the name, and more'n that I can't bring to mind."

"Then let it pass," said Ned Low, sinking back against the rail.

"Aye, sir," said bosc. "Four bells it is, sir."

"Make it so, bosc," I told him, and he went off into the darkness.

The brazen tinkle of the bell had died away before Ned Low spoke again.

"And what think you, George," he said, "of sailing mate with Bloody Ned?"

I laughed a little at that.

"What else but your own words, Ned? We're not on the Account, but for honest gold, you say; and enough said. There's a reason behind every man sails up the sea, you say; and enough said. For the rest, I like you, I have two fists, and if I go to the devil it's my own fault and no other man's leading."

"Well said, George. What reason is behind you?"

"Ruined fortunes, a girl who jilted me, and lack of ties to keep me ashore. Those in the first place. In the latter place, love of good ships, work to do and strength to do it with, and knowledge of my profession. For I hold the sea to be a profession, Ned, in despite of all men! I sailed a small sloop with two boys from the Azores to Barbados once to prove the fact. What was more, I built the sloop before sailing her."

"You're a philosopher, George, and — me if I don't wish I might be one too!" he responded, and sighed. "Work to do, and strength and knowledge to do it with! What more could any man ask of fortune? But my work's undone as yet, and when done it's only a man hanged after all, and small joy of it to me!"

With this he rose, and was gone down below.

I wondered much about his words and his curious tale of Trunnel Toby, and what reason must lie behind his strange pursuit of that creature up and down the waters of the earth. Reason in plenty there must be, but I could not evoke it from his words. It began to appear, however, that he was not the black pirate he was painted, and this was something to cheer me.

So the night wore through, and the wind

neld fair, sweeping us steadily to the southward on our course, and with the dawn or a little while after we gathered all hands in the waist. Now all the world was shut away from us. We aboard the *King Sagamore*, bounded by those walls of English oak and India teak, were in a little world apart, devils and angels and men together. There was the dead man, shrouded decently; and by him Ned Low, book in hand, and dark, quick-eyed Russel, dirk and pistol in belt, and Gunner Basil, pale, terrible eyes flaming and stabbing about. Little love those pale eyes bore me, either!

There, too, Bosun Pilcher, gold earrings bobbing beside savage brown cheeks, and back of him the men, making a full score of us, all told. Some I had come to know by this time. Dickon the cabin-boy, gray with the sickness and mouthing vile oaths; Simon Blake and Ezra Blake his brother, gaunt, hard-jawed fellows who could prate psalms by the hour; and Philip the cook, a black man who was very joyful about his work and always grinning. Humphrey Stave was chips and sailmaker, a bent gnarled figure with deep eyes behind spectacles, and a bit deaf; Stave was the only other man forward who was not a man of religion and godliness, so that he companioned much with Pilcher.

The others were all hard men, devout enough and good seamen, but given to exhorting each other with prayer and advice. Dennis Langton had picked them for this very reason, having no mind to ship pirates on this voyage.

None the less, he had made a mistake. One of the men, Thomas Winter, was long in the face, a real horse's face indeed, seeming but little short of a half-wit, nor ever raised his eyes to meet those of another man.

Well, we buried poor Dennis Langton there, sliding him off into the rolling seas; and after reading the proper service Ned Low softly asked the gunner to speak a prayer. Gunner Basil did so, praying a good ten minutes in a long, whining singsong, the other knaves all joining in with their nasal "Amen" when the spirit moved.

Then breakfast, and then to the cabin for the promised meeting, while Gunner Basil held the deck. And in this meeting I had sight of Polly Langton and likewise got a bid from fortune.

IV



WE GATHERED in the stern cabin, and the new sunlight streamed down through the small skylight above and illumined the cabin with a glory of radiance as the ship rolled. Between stern window and skylight we had plenty of light.

The cabin was not ornate. It was our mess cabin aft, and was meant for use, not for ornament. Along the stern wall under the window ran a long file of muskets, locked in their rack by an iron bar and padlock. A locker for charts, another for instruments; a huge cupboard that held dishes and wine and other things; table and chairs and iron lantern slung in gimbals—this was all. Under the table was a trap leading to the lazaret below.

With the traces of grief gone from her cheeks Polly Langton sat down, and we after her. For lack of mourning she wore her gray gown; a kerchief about her throat fastened by a gold brooch; and what a head was this rising above! All a glory of yellow gold hair, and a red-cheeked, west-country face that was filled with sweetness and ability, browned by the sun and air, with skin delicately textured as any court lady's!

Yet the splendor of her face lay in the eyes; gray with golden flecks were they, level and meeting a man's gaze fair and unafraid; deliberate eyes, not to be hurried or overborne. Through these windows one perceived the fine woman's soul within, shrinking a little, yet meeting the issues of fate with a certain cool poise that was almost disdain. Could this girl ever be waked into hot passionate anger or emotion, I thought, she would stop at nothing!

Painted and powdered, patched and gowned, Polly Langton might have been no beauty; but in her simplicity she was beautiful enough. I did not miss the grip that was in Russel's eyes as he watched her; nor did she; for she gave him a slow look that made him change countenance.

Ned Low, when we were seated, put on the table before him that little black snuff-box which I had brought him from Langton. Then Russel spoke up, civilly but with a thrust to his words.

"One minute, cap'n! This is secret company business. Why does George Roberts sit with us?"

"At my bidding," and Ned Low smiled a little, taking no offense. "He is my friend,

and I trust him to the full. Also I propose that he is to have a full third of my share of the gold when recovered——”

“I want no gifts, Ned,” I intervened.

“No gift at all, George Roberts,” he returned, a somber look in his eyes. “We don’t know what lies ahead of us, but I think you are going to be a great man in this enterprise, and here you, a captain like myself, are serving as mate. Zounds, man! Was it not agreed between us that first night we met?”

“As to that I can’t say,” was my response, and Ned uttered a laugh.

“It’s a company matter,” spoke up Russel, an ugly note in his voice. “Put it to the vote, I say!”

“It’s no company matter what I do with my own,” snapped Low angrily, a dark color rising in his cheeks. “But the deciding voice lies with Miss Polly, and I put the vote. What say you, madam?”

All this while the girl had been looking at me with appraising eyes. Now she leaned back in her chair and spoke as if she had no interest in the affair.

“I agree,” she said quietly, “though it is your own business, as you say.”

So Russel sat back and bit his lip.

“Now,” began Ned Low, “let us inform Captain Roberts of our quest. You’ve heard of the pirate Franklin, George? Some time since, I was in company with him when he took a huge amount of moldores out of a Portuguese Indiaman from Goa.”

He broke off, for the girl was holding his eye. He flushed a trifle once more.

“Then it is true,” she asked coolly, “that you and Mr. Russel were on the Account, as they call it?”

“That is true,” said Ned. “It is also true that I would touch no penny of the loot, my lady. Then I had no use for it. Now I have use. Captain Franklin buried a great share of the gold, which he swore belonged to me, on one of the Verde Islands. He and I alone knew the place. It is this gold that we go to recover.

“According to the agreement, a third share goes to me, another to John Russel, another to Mistress Langton here. Out of my share, a third goes to Captain Roberts. This is understood and agreed?”

A nod came from the other two. But now Polly Langton spoke up—cool and well-considered words; and her speech must have come as a tremendous shock to each one of us.

“Since Captain Roberts is a friend of yours, Captain Low, and is to share in your proceeds, he is evidently tarred with the same brush as you and Mr. Russel! By your own word you are pirates. How my poor uncle came to his death I know not, but I think it was through entering into this scheme of yours.

“Shame on you! He was an honest city merchant, and you bloody men tangled him in your ruthless wiles! Had it not been for you we would still be living in Lombard Street, and happy there.”

She paused, coldly deliberate. Ned Low was staring at her like a man thunderstruck. John Russel was all agape, but harsh amusement was rising in his eyes. Before it could break out she was calmly continuing her speech.

“I promised my uncle to take this gold if we got it. What I do with my share is another matter. I may be penniless, but beyond taking out what my poor uncle put into this venture, I’ll not turn this bloody coin to my own use.

“Very well, then. I want it understood plainly that I’m a full third partner in this enterprise, and intend to remain so. I’m not to be put in a corner and disregarded because I am a woman. My uncle picked a good crew for this voyage; if you gentlemen think you can run away with this ship or go pirating, you’ll discover otherwise. We are here for a certain purpose, and none other.”

Now her voice softened—perhaps from what she read in the eyes of Ned Low.

“Indeed I do not mean to speak like a shrew, but there’s the fact. You’re pirates. I am a woman, but I have some ability at sea. The crew are honest men. I think you mean me well, and will respect the oath which you gave my poor uncle; but I want to have things understood. Already the men are whispering that you intend running away with the ship. Be careful! That’s all. I am through, Captain Low.”

There was a space of silence, while we stared at her. It was easy to perceive that Dennis Langton had kept her ignorant of his past. She thought him a good, honest merchant, not knowing that he had buccaneered with the worst of them, had partnered with the infamous Spriggs. She was acting upon genuine belief, deeming the rest of us mighty insecure men.

Russel uttered a laugh and began to

speech, a sneer in his heavy eyes. Ned Low turned to him, face set and cold, and uttered three words—

"Be silent, John!"

Russel checked himself, shrugged and leaned back grinning. Thus the matter passed; Ned was trying to keep from the poor girl the knowledge of what her uncle had been, was trying to leave her memory of him unsoiled. Yet he was a fool for his pains. She was bound to learn the truth eventually.

"Since I haven't known you or your friends three days, Miss Polly," I said easily, "you can't charge me with their crimes. My record is clear for all men to read, and if you'll go out to Virginia you'll find that it's not a bad record either. And as to Captain Low, I believe you'll find that he's——"

"Stow it, George!" snapped Low.

I obeyed, for he was angry.

He looked across the table at the girl, and she at him, though her gaze had softened a bit. Very handsome he was, and too proud to take notice of her words. He opened the black snuff-box that lay before him and took out the hard, folded bit of vellum, all the while keeping his eyes on the girl. And then he spoke to her briefly.

"Dear lady, you have naught to fear from us, upon my honor! Now let us to business. I propose to lay this little chart before you—Franklin himself made it—and then destroy the thing. We shall keep the position of the moidores in our own minds. If by any chance of the sea we do not reach the Verde Islands, then whichever one of us can first come to the spot is at liberty to take the gold."

There was a little silence while he opened up the vellum. It was not easy, for the whitish skin was hard and dry and promised to crack at the folds. As he opened it slowly, I saw that on one side of it was writing, and that over the ink there had been wax laid on and polished, keeping the ink waterproof.

Then abruptly the voice of the girl leaped at us. Soft it was, but uttered in broad Devon that betrayed her apprehension and fear.

"Quick! Catch mun—look to door!"



SHE said afterward that the door-catch had moved slightly. Russel saw it, for he was out of his chair, silent and with a stealthy agility that amazed me, and in two steps was at the

door. He opened it. There came a terrific crash as a tray dropped to the floor, and we saw Dickon the cabin-boy outside.

Russel had him by the shoulder and heaved him inside and swore at the ale that splattered his feet.

"What means this, lad?" demanded Ned Low angrily. "Who bade you listen at doors?"

The little imp was no whit in awe or frightened; he faced us in sullen defiance. He could not have seen fifteen years, yet the debased evil of his features would have done credit to any pirate, and he glowered at us with all the hatred of a man for men.

"It bain't so," he said stoutly. "I weren't a-listening, Master Low! Cook Philip sent me wi' breakfast for mistress—and now look at un! Pewter bent, ale gone——"

Russel gave him a hearty cuffing and threw him out into the passage. As the boy picked himself up I saw the look he flung at Russel—a deadly, vicious look such as comes from the eyes of a disturbed and angry snake. Then Russel slammed the door shut and came back to his chair.

"I was mistaken," spoke up Polly contritely. "I thought perhaps some one was listening—I'm sorry if little Dickon suffered for my error."

"He's not hurt," said Russel. "Now, Ned, out with it! Which one of the islands is it?"

"St. Vincent," answered Captain Low, holding the vellum spread out under his fingers. "You know it?"

"I've not landed there," said Russel.

"Franklin has it marked 16°49' north latitude, by 7°6' west longitude from the Cape de Verde," went on Ned Low, "but I think he's off a point or two. George, get out the charts, will you? We'll show Miss Polly just where we're going."

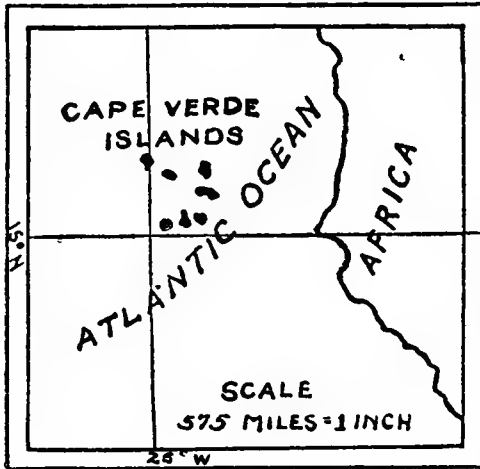
I got out the proper chart, by which time the others were ready to relinquish the bit of vellum to me, though Russel watched me keenly while I handled it. Upon it was rudely scratched the outline of St. Vincent, one of several uninhabited and rocky islands to the northwest of the Cape Verde group. On the northeast tip of the island was marked a cross, with the bearings below. I uttered an exclamation.

"Upon my word, gentlemen! I remember this place; I was there for turtle while we were making salt at the Isle de Sal! Aye, the very spot—and we had best lay up the

ship in the cove at the north side of the island, which is the closest."

"It is ill spoke of on the chart," said Russel, looking up.

"Aye, for the trades blow square into it," I assented. "But a ship may be towed out by boats during the morning calm. I've seen the St. Nicholas men do it often. And the bay is so smooth that you may lay a ship ashore without the least damage."



"Memorize those bearings, George," said Ned Low. "We must destroy the thing."

That was an easy matter, the more so that I knew the exact spot. The northeast side of the island, unlike the rest, is low and sandy. A cable-length off the shore at low tide is a round, smooth rock that rises like a broken column out of the water to the height of ten feet; Franklin had marked it "Tower Rock," and there could be no mistake. Bearing from this due west a quarter-mile were a group of dragon-trees.

Now I recalled these trees quite clearly, since they were the only group of this species which had escaped destruction, and I was interested in their singular nature and had even visited them, getting some of the gum. Half a cable-length to the west-and-by-north of these trees was a large boulder jutting out of the sand, and the gold was buried on the north side of that boulder.

So said the vellum, and you may judge of my interest in the matter, and of how the others were interested to hear me tell of the place as I knew it, though I did not recall that boulder. Franklin had been a few

points amiss on his bearings of the island, but that was nothing. He certainly was not astray on his local features.

"Do you think," Polly Langton asked me, a sparkle in her eyes, "that any one might have come there and found the treasure?"

"Not unless he were looking for it," I told her. "No one comes to that island except for turtle, or to shoot wild goats, or to fish. The black island men from St. Nicholas come there often, but they make no stay. There is fresh water in a large bay on the northwest side the island—Porto Grande it is called."

"Aye, it is marked."

Ned Low rolled up the big chart.

"Russel," he went on, "have you finished with the bearings? And you, George? And you, Miss Polly?"

We had it all in our heads, well enough. So Captain Low struck a light, and presently the white vellum curled and crumpled and became a black ash on the table. Then Low looked up at us, and laughed in his gay manner.

"And now, comrades, a sneaker to our good luck and fortune!"

He brought wine and flagons from the cupboard, and we pledged Franklin's gold, the girl with a flash to her eye and color to her cheek. Then, since Polly Langton had not yet broken her fast, I went to hasten Dickon with his second tray, and so took charge of the deck. And this ended our conference.

We had now no further talk among ourselves of the gold, for it was a dangerous matter, and would keep well enough until we arrived at the spot. With the next morning indeed foul weather came upon us; not contrary, but heavy gales that swept us on our course yet kept all hands on the jump. Day after day they continued unabated, and the *King Sagamore*, for all her battering and straining, leaked no more water than could be got rid of in an hour's pumping of mornings.

During those days we were too busy to have much time for mischief, which in the light of after events I think was most fortunate. There was indeed some preaching and ranting up forward, but since it gave the men an outlet we made no objection, even when Gunner Basil made long-winded discourses of a Sabbath.

What with the ship's roll, few of us were not seasick at times, and I saw little of

Polly Langton these days. What little I did see, however, woke in me admiration for her bearing and character and spirit. I think she had ceased to class me with pirates, for she was smiling and merry when we met, and sometimes took the wheel during my watch on deck, fighting it with the skill of any man among us.

Dickon the cabin-boy was quite sick during this period, which was another fortunate thing in my opinion. We replaced him for the time with Thomas Winter, the long-faced half-wit of whom I have spoken. A curious man was that, who seldom spoke, never met the level look of an eye, and mingled not at all with the other men. He had been long at sea; his hands and forearms were much tattooed; yet none could get him to speak of his goings and comings. He had a vacancy in his aspect that surely belied his wits.

This fellow Winter, also, seemed to be taken with strange spells. One day at noon we had a fleeting glimpse of the sun, and after shooting him with Low I hastily left the deck and jumped below to make calculations and verify our reckoning. As I came into the cabin I found Gunner Basil there, and the man Thomas Winter was speaking to him. I had chance to hear only a few words, but those were spoken in a new voice to me—a sane and sound and bellowing voice.

"Why, — your eyes!" Winter was roaring at the gunner. "Who are you to tell me what to do, you whelp of Satan? You stow your jaw, blast you! I'm the one——"

He broke off at sight of me, and cringed. I was the more astonished, for Gunner Basil seemed to be taking his oaths with shame-faced manner.

"What's this?" I broke in upon them. "Winter, was that you I heard? What d'ye mean?"

"Pardon, sir," he mumbled. "They roarin' winds do fetch gusty words out o' me at times, sir, and all o' seven devils a-perched up aloft!"

He shambled away out of the cabin. Gunner Basil looked at me, wagged his head sorrowfully and tapped his skull. He let out his nasal whine.

"Bear with him, sir; bear with him! The poor afflicted fellow deserves the patience of all men. If he is a bit daft, he is also a good seaman—can hold her by the wind wi' never a flutter o' canvas from hour to hour!"

With an impatient word I settled down to

my figures. Afterward I remembered again the complete change of voice and language which had been effected in the daft man, and how he had cringed at sight of me. This wakened my pity, and I thought no more of the incident.

V



FAIR weather came back to us as suddenly as it had departed, and found us well advanced on our course, though much strained and battered about. Within two days all our sick were recovered, and we fell to work overhauling the rigging as we sailed, for the new cordage had stretched abominably and must be re-pitched into the bargain.

Hardly had we come into clear skies, however, than trouble let loose aft, as if it had been waiting for fine weather before breaking.

We were heeling smartly along under a spanking breeze out of the northeast-and-by-east, everything drawing well, and four bells of the afternoon had just struck. Old Humphrey Stave was seated by the for'ard water-butt, working with palm and needle at a spare topsail when the bosun appeared and talked for a little with his crony. Then Pilcher came aft, touched his forelock, begged some tobacco from me and fell into talk. He had something at the back of his mind, but was slow in reaching it.

"Cook be heatin' of some pitch in the galley," he observed, "when you're ready to get that for'ard rigging painted, sir."

Simon Blake was at the wheel.

"When it's ready," I said, "send a man aft to relieve Simon here, and let him and Ezra Blake take up the buckets. They're good careful men, and I don't want the deck spattered."

"Aye, sir."

Pilcher shook his earrings, then gave me a queer look.

"There be some wild talk for'ard, sir," he went on.

"What about, bosc?"

"That you've been on the Account, sir, and I give the lie to it. But that bain't all. I don't like them there godly men, nor they me; but I've heard whispers. They do say as you and Mr. Russel and Mr. Low ain't doin' right by the lass, and that she's mortal afraid o' you gentlemen. Then there's summat about Mr. Russel bein' one Portugee Lopez, and it bain't no secret that Mr. Low is Bloody Ned——"

"Who's doing this talk?" I demanded, frowning.

We were beyond earshot of the helmsman.

"That I don't know, sir; just driftin', it is. These godly scum for'ard seem to think they'll be made turn pirate."

"We'll work it out of 'em," I said cheerfully. "Run along and attend to that pitch now."

He swung forward. Barely had he gone when from below came Polly Langton and Captain Low. They flung me a bare nod, then resumed some talk they had started below decks, and I saw that the girl was flushed and earnest, while poor Ned Low was cold and set and hard in the face. They paused by the windward rail, so that their words came to me and to Simon Blake, at the wheel.

"And have you no shame for it?" demanded the girl hotly.

"Shame?"

Ned uttered a curt, bitter laugh.

"By the Lord Harry, no! If I'd hanged twice a hundred men, and knew that twice that number would yet die to my hand, I'd go on to the end and be proud of it!"

"I am sorry to hear such words on your lips," and she spoke gravely, her anger held down. "I had thought you a gentleman, and I find you glorying in your bloody deeds, in your piracies and murders! Go on to the end, you say. Do you dare admit that your share of this enterprise is to be used in the same fashion—that if the venture succeeds, if you buy out this ship from our company, you go on the Account once more?"

I cursed under my breath, for Simon Blake was drinking all this in, as his dour face testified; yet I dared not intervene.

"Aye," said Ned Low. "I'll not lie to you, Miss Polly."

"Oh, shame on you!" she cried out. "To think that you and your precious friends so inveigled my poor uncle! You and they, to take this money and use it for more piracy and murder—how do I know you and they will respect that oath to my uncle?"

"Why, take us on trust!"

Ned broke into a laugh, half-vexed, half of whimsical exasperation.

"As for my friends, I care not and know not what they'll do with their share. My share puts Bloody Ned on his feet again, madam, and that's my own affair."

She gave him a long look, eyes angry, bosom heaving.

"Then I am minded to draw out of this venture, sir."

"You can't."

Low turned on her, pressed beyond endurance.

"This is a company matter, my girl—don't try to make trouble! There's more behind it all than you know. There's more hangs on it than you know. We'll see you safe in London again with your share; and beyond that—have a care! This gold o' Franklin's belongs to all of us, mind, not you alone."

Now, whether she had meant her threat I know not, but Simon Blake caught his breath sharply, and his face was set in grim lines. But the girl laughed out right merrily under the angry gaze of Ned Low—perhaps she had only meant to tease him; after all. Then she turned and went below without more speech, while Ned fell to pacing the quarterdeck.

It was a moment after this that Thomas Winter, who was in my watch, came shambling aft to relieve Simon Blake from his trick. A few words passed between them. I stepped up, and Winter repeated the order to go for'ard and tar the lines. Blake nodded assent and obeyed.

I followed forward, as Simon and Ezra Blake secured their buckets and brushes, and came to a pause beside the water-butt, where Humphrey Stave sat and sewed.

"Do those buntlines and the forelift first," I told them, "then work in along the yards from each side, and do the shrouds as you come down. Simon, overhaul that loose foot-rope at the strap, on the fore-yard; tighten it up and watch your seizing."

"Aye, sir," responded Simon, passing the lanyard of his bucket about his neck.

The two men mounted, and a moment later I turned to find Ned Low at my elbow. He gave me a whimsical glance, and chuckled softly.

"Caught the — and no mistake, eh? You heard?"

I nodded.

"Aye, Ned. So did Blake, at the helm. The men for'ard are talking already about things."

"Oh, trice up a couple and give 'em a dozen apiece," he said carelessly, "and there'll be no more gossip. Somebody's been talking to the lass, though, and I don't

like it. John Russel has his eye on her. You watch sharp, lad."

"Well, Humphrey Stave, how goes it with the palm? Man, that's as neat a patch as ever I saw laid!"

Old Humphrey squinted up over his spectacles.

"Aye, master, and thankee! You'm be good judge of un, sir."

For a moment Low stood glancing around the deck. What he saw in that swift, eagle-like glance of his, I never knew. But suddenly his hand fell on my arm, and his voice sounded in my ear. Ah, the urgency, the repressed fury, of that voice!

"Quick, for the love of Heaven! Loaded pistols in the chart locker. Get Russel and the gunner. Don't run aft, now—easy does it——"

My blood jumped. I turned and walked aft, seeking as I did so what had caused his abrupt alarm and caution. Except that most of the port watch were on deck sunning themselves, I could see nothing out of the ordinary. The men seemed to eye me hard as I passed aft, but that might have been imagination. The quarterdeck was empty, save for the long figure of Thomas Winter at the helm.

Once at the companionway I was down the ladder with a leap, and darted aft to the cabin. Russel was doubled up in my cabin; I paused to fling open the door.

"John! Up and arm—quick, man!"

He had his own arms, and usually wore them, so I darted on into the main cabin and in the chart locker came upon two pistols, loaded and primed. I ran back, found Russel sitting on the edge of his bunk and blinking at me, and swore at him.

"On deck! Swift about it!"

I ran on down the passage and came to the companion ladder. As I started up it, something flew out of the darkness below—a knife, that whanged into the wood beyond my ear with a vicious song. Who flung it I could not see and dared not pause to ask, for I was in fear of what might be happening forward.

Up the ladder and to the deck again, and just in time to see it happen!



THEY thought me gone below, of course, thought Ned Low alone there among them, the dogs! As my head came up, I saw the thing fall—saw the bucket, heavy with pitch, leave the hand of

Simon Blake and go hurtling down from the topsail yard. Low did not see it, but he saw Bosun Pilcher gape upward and heard Pilcher cry out and leap aside blindly.

There was a terrible dull sound, and old Humphrey Stave threw out his arms and bent forward across his sail with his skull stove in. Another and more frightful cry burst from Pilcher; I saw the bosun lean back, saw his arm curl and straighten, saw his knife go flaming up through the air.

"Take it, ye —— murderer of old men!" he yelled out, and Simon Blake took it fair in the throat, and pitched off the yard clear of the ship's side.

Now there was a heave of men over Pilcher; and I, running forward, saw Ezra Blake lean over from the futtock shrouds and drop his own heavy bucket toward Ned Low. The latter, warned by my shout, leaped aside once more and the bucket missed. I flung up one pistol and shot the treacherous hound, and he fell straight at the foot of the foremast, where men were tearing cutlasses from the rack.

Then Ned Low was into them with both hands, and as one man swung at him with a blade I fired again and that man fell. All this, and the body of Ezra dropping among them, and the sight of me running forward, with John Russel behind me and the gunner also on deck, gave them pause.

Pilcher broke loose and stood beside the captain, and I joined them. Then came Russel leaping like a hound across the deck with a pistol in one hand and knife in the other, and a wild grin upon his dark face. Behind him came Gunner Basil, long hair flying, pale eyes darting about.

"Up with those cutlasses again, ye dogs!" shouted Low, and they obeyed sullenly. "So it's mutiny, is it—murder and mutiny, ye swine of righteousness! You there about the arms rack, stand fast!"

Four of the men there were, still half-determined to fly at us, and Low held out his hand toward them.

"Gunner Basil! Trice up those four devils. Bese, pipe all hands and give those rascals two dozen."

One of the other men stepped forward defiantly and stretched his arm at Pilcher.

"There's the man o' blood, cap'n!" he shrilled forth. "Flung his knife, he did, and murdered poor Simon Blake, as godly a man as ever walked——"

"After Blake tried to stave in my head,

eh?" said Low, pale with fury. "After he'd murdered poor chips, eh?"

"It was an accident!" cried out the man. "I seen his lanyard break and——"

"You lie," said I angrily. "I saw him fling the bucket. You liar, go and join those four scoundrels and take a dozen yourself for your lies!"

"Approved," added Ned Low curtly. "Bind these five men, you dogs, and do it swift! Where's the gunner?"

"Here I be, sir."

Gunner Basil came to the front. He gave an order, and for a moment I thought there would be open mutiny. Then as John Russel grinned and lifted pistol the men obeyed. The five about the mast were bound.

"Now, men," said Low sternly. "I want an explanation of this. Pick your spokesman and send him aft to me as soon as the lashing is over."

He turned and walked aft. Then came Polly Langton running, and joined Pilcher, who was holding the head of poor old Humphrey Stave in his arms, tears coursing down his savage brown cheeks. Humphrey blinked up out of the blood, and saw the girl there, white and feared.

"Oh minny, minny!" cried the dying man. "Here's your lad Humphrey coom home again! Oh, minny, I ha' cried for 'ee! Home from sea, minny, wi' presents for 'ee——"

His head sagged over, and that was all save that Pilcher broke into a storm of sobbing and wild cursing grief. Then the girl's voice thrust in.

"What—what is all this?"

She saw the five men being led aft to the main.

"What have those men done? I heard shots——"

"Murder and mutiny, lass," said John Russel, smirking at her. "But for George Roberts here they had murdered Ned Low and taken the ship."

"Aye, and they killed poor old Humphrey," I added. "Bose, go and do your duty, man."

Tears unwiped, Pilcher leaped up and ran aft for his lash. White-faced, the girl stared about, saw the five being triced up and knew the purpose of it. I called to the other men about us, and at my order they laid out old Humphrey and Ezra Blake. Simon was gone into the deep already. The other man whom I had shot was but wounded across the scalp.

"Take charge here, John," I said to Russel. "I must see to a matter below."

I went aft, passing Ned Low, who stood white and stern at the rail of the quarter-deck, his eyes glittering fiercely. How far this mutiny extended we could not tell, of course; whether all the crew were in it, or only the two Blakes. Perhaps indeed Simon Blake had merely seized the chance to kill the captain without premeditation.

Going below, I looked along the ladder for that knife which had so narrowly missed my head. The knife was gone, and I swore roundly to myself over the fact. Either Gunner Basil or Russel had flung it, I felt convinced, and I suspected the former. As I looked, Dickon the cabin-boy came sleepily to the foot of the ladder, rubbing his eyes.

"What be the fuss, sir?" he asked. "I was asleep down yonder——"

"Get up and see," I responded. "And let the flogging of better men keep you from evil courses, younker! Up with you."

He went to the deck above, and I after him. And there I saw a thing that was bad for discipline.

Pilcher had begun laying on the lash, and the first man under his whip was bloody, for the bosun was in savage mind. But Polly Langton had stopped him and now was standing by, looking aft at Ned Low and demanding that the men be given fair trial. Poor lass! She little dreamed what her intervention was going to mean in the end!

"Dear girl," replied Ned softly enough, yet with steel in his voice, "these men ha' tried to murder me and take the ship. They ha' done murder already. They're getting off light with two dozen, lass. Stand aside, and interfere not!"

"I'll not have it!" she stormed back at him. "You bloody-minded pirates, this is past endurance! These poor men——"

"Bose!"

Now the voice of Ned Low thundered out like a trumpet across the deck.

"Lay on, I bid ye!"

Pilcher shook his earrings, and the cat swung, and the man under it screamed out. At this, Polly Langton turned about, and held out an arm to the men who watched the scene.

"Help me stop it!" she cried wildly enough. "Take the ship from these pirates, these murderous brutes—come, men! Stand by me; don't let your comrades be lashed like dogs——"

Well, the words died on her lips as she saw the uselessness of it. John Russel, all agrin until his teeth flashed white in the sun, stood to one side, and the hearts of the men sickened in them under his look. So Polly knew that her plea was futile, and with a little groan that hurt my soul she turned again to Ned Low.

"Well do they call you Bloody Ned!" she said in a slow and deliberate voice that carried far. "Never dare to speak to me again, you or your friends—I wash my hands of you and your filthy gold and all your doings! Go on; do your worst to these helpless men, but never speak to me, I command you!"

With this she bent her head and, tears on her cheeks, went aft and so below. While Bosun Pilcher, tears likewise on his own cheeks but from different cause, brought down the cat with all his brawn in the blow, so that the hurt man screamed again.

Presently it was done, Gunner Basil standing by and counting the blows to each man. Then, the groaning dogs staggering forward, Ned Low summoned the spokesman from the other men. All this while Thomas Winter had stuck to the wheel, wagging his long face vacantly but keeping the ship close to her course.

The spokesman came aft. A young, hard-faced fellow he was, by name David Spry, and he poured forth a long and whining plea, full of pious sentiments. The gist of it was that none of the men had intended mutiny; that they believed Bosun Pilcher had murdered Simon Blake and had so acted; that they were repentant and heartily sorry for their misdoing, and humbly begged forgiveness. All in all it was a moving and earnest plea, full of arrant hypocrisy and a lie from start to finish. Ned Low told the man as much.

"What's got into you godly rogues I don't know," he concluded. "But I know who's master o' this ship, and you'll know it, every man of you! Go for'ard. All hands stand by to bury the dead at two bells in the next watch. That's all."

David Spry went forward, and we shifted the men about so that the watches were again balanced. But Bosun Pilcher sat up in the forechains and cried like a baby over the passing of old Humphrey.

That evening after the dead were gone and it was again my watch Ned Low came up to me as I was having the lights filled

and placed. We were alone upon the quarterdeck save for the man at the helm, and we were out of hearing.

"George," said Low quietly, "what the — can I do with her? She won't join us at mess, won't so much as speak to any of us aft. Her attitude has already had an effect on the men. — me, I can't take the girl by the neck and throttle her!"

"If you did, Ned—" and I checked myself.

A low laugh came from him.

"Oh, aye! You'd be at my throat. Well, lad, much joy to you of the vixen if you win her. An honest lass, with the courage of her convictions—but oh, good Lord!"

The words came from him in a groan.

"Five years ago this night I was a man in hell, George. Look ye, now! I'm suspicious of this Gunner Basil. Philip, the cook, came to me tonight, and, says he, Basil and our half-wit Winter met outside the galley, and Winter drew a knife on the gunner, cursing him most vile.

"Now see what you've done, you bastard!" says Winter. 'For tuppence I'd cut the rotten heart out of you for not waiting, you dog, you!'

"That's strange talk for the daft man, George. And the cook says that Gunner Basil was in mortal fear. This Winter may be harmless, but like most daft men he may have dangerous spells."

"I don't doubt it," I answered and told him of that day when I had come on Thomas Winter down in the cabin. "Excitement seems to send the poor madman's wits flying. But what's all this got to do with five years ago tonight, Ned?"

"I don't know," said he shortly enough.

For a moment he laid his arm across my shoulders.

"Oh, lad," he said softly, "don't you see that the lass is raising — with those honest fools up for'ard—and herself all honest, too?"

"Aye," I told him. "But how to prevent it?"

"Ask the stars, George," and he drew away with a laugh.

"— me if I know! Good night."

VI



ALL this while I had not seen a great deal of John Russel. The little we saw of each other, however, intensified the feelings that had arisen between us that morning on the quay below

London Bridge. I heartily detested his smooth, sneering ways, and I think he was unable to puzzle me out—had not the honesty to take me for what I was, yet could not quite fathom me for a knave like himself. Ned Low, I felt certain, distrusted the man on general principles.

Fools that we were! We might better have directed our suspicions elsewhere, had we known it—but how were we to know it? Thus moves life itself, toward some vain objective, only to find itself suddenly directed toward othersome. For now, looking back at it all, I really believe that Russel was square enough in his intent toward the rest of us; but our mutual dislike ripened into distrust, and the distrust rotted into maggots of hatred, all quickly and suddenly.

It happened one day when the wind was fitful and changing, and the air heavy with brooding storm, so that all hands were kept bracing about the yards and men's tempers were apt to fly out at nothing. Not that I make any excuse of this for my own part, since through several days Russel and I had been approaching a crisis.

This came about in some degree through the attitude of Polly Langton. Ever since that day Humphrey Stave was slain she had kept to her word and held no intercourse with any of us aft. Her meals were served in her own tiny box of a cabin, and she treated us with a stony silence as if we did not exist. When she walked the deck, it was forward; and often she talked with the men, and sometimes would relent a little when I saluted her, though she spoke not.

Because I perceived that she thus softened a little toward me, her manner irked me not at all; but John Russel it infuriated. I observed that after some meeting with her he would walk the decks like a devil incarnate, raging among the men; and once he beat David Spry so furiously with a belaying-pin that the seaman bore the marks of it a fortnight.

Not that he had cause, either. The men were tamed, were obedient and lively and had given no further sign of any trouble.

Between me and John Russel, however, the hot tropic sun quickened ill-feeling. On the morning in question we had a sharp exchange of words when watches were changed. Having lost three men, we were short in each watch; added to which, one of the men was ill with the ague, passing from a quotidian into a tertian, and being

too weak to move. So Russel desired to shift Bosun Pilcher out of my watch into his own, which offer I very bluntly refused. We nearly came to blows over it, yet did not.

At eight bells in the afternoon I turned over the deck to him and went below at once to get some sleep; storm was brewing and the heaviness of the air had given me a headache. As I came below I met Dickon in the passage and ordered him to fetch me a mug of ale into the main cabin. There I sat down to the table to pick our course on the chart, as we were getting close to the islands and had need of care.

Hearing some one enter, I spoke over my shoulder without looking up, thinking it Dickon.

"We're past the Canaries, and I would we had some of that wine aboard! Go you and tell Philip to get a fresh butt brought up for'ard, for the water in that is foul, and to have it well lashed in place at once."

"—— your impudence!" said the voice of Russel. "Run your own errands, you cursed Virginian."

I turned to see Russel at the cupboard, pouring a cup of wine.

"Hark 'ee, Russel or Lopez," I told him, "a little more civility, if you please! I took you for Dickon——"

"—— sink you and your takings!" he broke in with a sudden access of fury, turning at me and snarling like a wolf.

Just then Ned Low came into the cabin, and Russel gulped at his wine. Ned perceived nothing amiss, but came and glanced at the chart and chuckled merrily.

"Ha, good and well done, George! By the Lord Harry, we've a record to boast of this voyage—hardly a ship spoke, not a head wind nor a calm, and a course fair and straight as an arrow to the islands! Gunner's on deck, John? I must speak with him."

He passed out and was gone. Russel looked after him with a dark sneer.

"Aye, you'll speak wi' Gunner Basil once too often!" he growled. "I've warned you against that pale-eyed devil, you poor fool of a gentleman, you——"

"Keep your tongue off Low," I snapped.

He whipped out an oath, and I saw murder in his eyes; his hand dived down to the pistol in his belt. At that I was out of the chair and at him and knocked the pistol into the corner.

His fist took me under the ear and smashed me against the wall. As I rose I caught sight of Dickon, ale-mug in hand, standing in the doorway and staring out of his evil eyes. Then Russel was atop of me, and his knife was out; but I met him with a blow from the shoulder that tapped the claret, and got out from the wall. He came on, cursing and letting drive with the knife, but I evaded him and got home another blow. Then sanity began to crowd into my brain.

"Let be, you fool!" I cried out, parrying his stroke. "More of this and we'll all find ourselves——"

He stopped short in his stride like a man paralyzed, and for an instant I thought that my words had checked him. It was not my words or my fist, however. He stood there with the knife held out toward me, and slowly his fingers loosened, so that it dropped and tinkled on the floor. His eyes widened on me and his mouth opened, but no words came forth.

Then a bubble of red froth broke on his lips; he dropped to his knees and rolled down on the floor, and I saw the haft of a knife sticking out from his back.

Even while I stared at him in blank horror and wonder I caught the shrill voice of that devil's spawn Dickon from the companionway.

"Ahoy, cap'n!" it cried out. "Cap'n Low! The mate ha' killed Mr. Russel, cap'n!"

John Russel, dying, heard that lifting, piercing cry. He heaved upward, raised himself to one elbow, wrenched up his head, and looked at me. A ghastly, twisted smile curled his lips as he slobbered the blood from his pierced lungs. He tried to speak, and could not—then sudden words burst from him.

"Now 'ware of them, Roberts, or you're snared! Tell Low—that the man—man Thomas Winter——"

He strangled in his own life-stream, and died on the word.

Now came Ned Low running, with the imp Dickon pointing and crying at his heels, and behind them Gunner Basil and the bosun. Some of the men were following; but Captain Low sent back an angry shout that checked them and ordered Pilcher back to keep the deck. The bosun obeyed with an ill grace and waved his hand to me before he went. Ned Low came on into the cabin.

"I seen it done, cap'n!" shrilled that little devil Dickon, pointing at me. "Took un in the back, 'e did——"

"You little liar!" I burst forth angrily. "It was you flung that knife——"

I started for him; but Gunner Basil whipped out a pistol at me, and I checked myself. A dying man does not waste words. John Russel had spent his last breath in warning me, and those pale, murderous eyes of the gunner's told me who was back of this snare. I think Gunner Basil would have pistoled me then, had not Ned Low knocked up his weapon.

"What in the devil's name is all this!" he cried out. "Dickon stow your jaw! George, what happened?"

"Why, Russel and I were fighting," I said bluntly. "In the midst of it Dickon there threw a knife and struck Russel in the back. That's all."

"A black lie!" screamed the boy, flying into a fury of rage. "It was you stabbed un as 'e leaned over the table—never give un a chance! And——"

"Do not cast the stain o' murder on the innocent boy, Mr. Roberts!" spoke out Gunner Basil in his best preaching manner. "A sanctified vessel is the lad——"

I plunged at him, but Ned Low caught my arm and flung me back. He turned a cold face to the gunner and ordered him on deck.

"It's your watch, and see that you keep it," he finished. "This is none of your affair. I want no more words from you, mind that!"

Basil looked him in the eye, and dropped his gaze.

"Aye, sir," he said, and departed to the deck meekly enough.

Ned Low took a step forward, leaned over the body of Russel and pulled forth the knife. He rose up and gave Dickon a keen glance.

"Dickon," he said in a kindly tone, "keep this matter to yourself. You understand?"

The little devil was no more astounded than I was, and could only stare and mumble something about Portugee Lopez. Ned Low nodded thoughtfully.

"True, Dickon. The man was pirate and outlaw. Tell the bosun to bring two hands here and remove the body. And no talking mind."

The imp gave me one exultant, diabolical grin, and departed. No sooner was he gone,

however, than Ned Low turned to me, a blaze of eager vehemence in his face.

"George, never mind talking!" he burst out softly. "Forgive me, lad. Don't ye see, the little fiend is not alone? Gunner's with him, and more besides. When the call came cook Philip was just yammering to me about some trouble for'ard, and there's a gale breaking within the hour and the sails to be handed. Let this matter pass for the moment; we'll make the boy confess his lie later on."

"You're right," I assented. "And, Ned! When Russel died he was trying to tell me something. He heard the boy shouting at you and warned me of a trap. He tried to send you some message about the man Winter but could not get it out."

Low's eyes narrowed speculatively.

"Winter! That proves my point; John had guessed the trouble for'ard—thought the daft man was in it, eh? John was no fool in such things. Well, slip a pistol into your pocket from the locker, George, and take the deck."

"Or, stay! You're weary. Go sleep, and bar your door; there's deviltry afoot somewhere. I'll take this watch. We can't trust Gunner Basil."

I nodded and went to my own cabin. There came a tramp of feet as a number of the men descended the ladder; also I heard Polly Langton's voice and knew that the girl was aroused by the noise. Like a coward I flung myself on my bunk and left Ned Low to do the explaining to the lass.

After perhaps an hour of sleep I awakened as the *King Sagamore* keeled over almost on her beam ends—wakened to the trampling of feet, the shouts of men, the pipe calling all hands. Getting hurriedly on deck, I found that the blow had come.

Except for a rag of sail forward we were stripped to meet it. The first blast of the wind had sent us over; now there was peace for a moment. The ship righted, fell away; and then the main fury of the storm drove down. Through the darkness the huge masses of cloud to windward were lightning-shot, sending an eery glare across the waters.

Now we beheld it coming—a white line of spray and spindrift, racing down from the horizon under the glare of lightning. I was busy amidships, getting everything lashed down anew, when the keen, cold blast of wind smote us I sang out to all

hands to hold on, and we leaped to the life-lines. Then we were smothered under water and spray.

Two of our men must have gone at that minute, for we never afterward saw them.



A POORER ship than the *King Sagamore* would never have risen out of that welter, for she laid over while three heavy seas swept her. Then she began to rise; the scrap of sail forward caught and held; she answered her helm and came before the wind, and we were off.

That night the loss of those two men was felt badly, for every hand was needed; and to add to our troubles the ship was making water, a butt having been loosened somewhere forward and the leak hard to get at. None the less we counted ourselves lucky all told; particularly in this, that the gale was driving us fair on our course, and we might look to raise the islands in two days or less.

Now of the company that had left London, twenty all told besides Polly Langton, we had lost six. Aft, there remained captain, mate and gunner, and we took the bosun into our company as second mate. Forward were Dickon, Philip the cook, Thomas Winter, and seven of the sons of righteousness who were led by David Spry; ten in all. It was by no means a large ship's company, but we could take on a few hands at the islands, for the Cape Verde men are glad to ship.

So night wore into dawn again, and ever we fled south and south with the storm roaring at our heels, the *King Sagamore* picked up and hurled forward with a hissing rush by every mountain-wave. With daybreak the leak began to show so bad that I resolved to take it in hand myself, for it was beneath a timber near the well on the larboard side.

Ordering Thomas Winter down into the hold with a lantern, I followed with David Spry to help me. We got the timber cut away about the trunnel, which remained fast in the plank; the butt had started indeed, and the water shot in the full breadth of the fourteen-inch plank.

When we had somewhat checked the force of the stream with oakum we moused the trunnel, took two clove hitches about it and lashed the trunnel to a bar, just as a port is lashed. I had brought along two rollers, or screws, such as we use in Virginia

to roll tobacco hogsheads; these I screwed fast at each corner of the plank and then lashed them into the bar. All this took time and energy; and, having done most of the work myself, I was half-drowned and aching in every muscle of my arms when we finished.

"Now, David Spry," I said, "fetch that calking mallet and drive the oakum tight. Lay more oakum on; and you, Winter, get us a chock of wood. We'll nail battens over that, and I'll guarantee she won't weep."

"Aye, sir," said David Spry, picking the mallet out of the water. "She'll not weep a drop."

Thomas Winter held up the lantern high. I was leaning against a beam for support. In the yellow light that half-witted face of Winter's altered suddenly to a look of such wild ferocity that I was for the moment paralyzed.

"She'll not weep, David Spry!" he cried out in a bellowing voice. "Strike, lad!"

The seaman struck—not at the seam, but at me.

The mallet caught me above the ear and drove my head against the oak. So sudden, so unexpected and bitter, was the assault, that before I knew what was happening I was dazed and reeling under the blow. I went down into the knee-deep water, and Spry flung himself on top of me, fetching me another crack that knocked the sense out of me.

So there was I taken like a pole-axed bull.

When I wakened again, it was to hear my name called. I found myself lying in darkness, but on dry planks. When I moved there echoed from the blackness a rattle of chains, and I found wrists and ankles in irons. By the surge and heave of the deck, the groanings of beams and the creak of the rudder-irons near by I perceived that I was lying in the lazaret aft, down in the run of the ship.

"George!" came a voice again to me. "George Roberts!"

"Hello, Ned!" I answered. "Is that you?"

"Aye," he replied as his foot touched mine. "Art hurt?"

"Naught worse than a lump or two over the ear. You're not taken likewise?"

"Taken without a blow, lad!"

His voice was bitter.

"They called me down, said that you needed me—and clapped a tarpaulin over my head as I came. — me! That half-

wit Winter has the strength o' ten men! Well, here I am, and here you are."

I was slow to speak, stunned by the realization of it. Mutiny at such a moment was madness—or so it seemed. Whom had they, except Gunner Basil, to manage the ship? And he was no navigator.

"I'd give a thousand pound," said Ned Low, "to know what it was John Russel tried to say about that devil Winter!"

"You don't think that it's he who has taken the ship?" I demanded.

"No, no!"

Ned Low laughed a little.

"This is Polly Langton's doing, George."

VII



THE passage of time was nothing to us as we lay in the pitch darkness amid the powder and the cabin stores. Indeed, we lay there the whole day unheeded, all hands being busy above; but the day seemed like weeks to us.

Ned Low had heard some smattering of talk while he and I were being chained in the lazaret; enough to show him that the mutiny had come about through Polly Langton. He had heard Spry swearing that they would stand by the lass and see us hanged for the pirates we were, which indeed appeared proof positive. Yet she was no navigator, though a good seaman in all else, so how could she hope to bring the ship to any port?

"Ned," I asked during the weary wait, "d'you mind that little black box I brought aboard from Langton? You've never said how it was he had the chart."

"I had left it with him to compare with a paper he had in Franklin's writing," said Ned Low. "Poor Langton! Little he guessed what was up this cruise!"

"Well," I said, "for one, I'm not so sure about Polly's being the chief mutineer. That devilish little wastrel Dickon has more infernal brain than we credited him with. I think now 'twas he tried to get me with his knife that day Humphrey Stave was killed. And Gunner Basil is a bad one for certain, though he may be holding to his pious pose. But where's Bosun Pilcher? He'll not turn against us."

"He was on deck when they nabbed me," came Low's voice. "Aye, he's true, and so is black Philip. But that cursed Thomas

Winters! I'd like to know what John Russel had to say about the dog."

"Ned," I said after a long space of silence, "tell me about your chase after this Trunnel Toby. And that day Humphrey Stave was killed, you remember? You said how five years ago that night something had happened. What is it all, Ned? What reason lay behind you and the wine-dark sea?"

"Oh ho! Art quoting Homer to me, eh?"

Ned Low's laugh rang bitter, but ended in a soft word.

"George, sometimes I think the waves are weary with weeping—but pshaw! Five years ago I had everything in life, George; university honors, a home and family, and the promise of a girl I loved."

These words had tumbled out of him as it were; jerkily to the flitting of his thought. Now for a little he was silent and finally spoke. His voice was hoarse, whether from the thirst that we had or from the tumult of his spirit I know not.

"Why, George, that is a lengthy recital, and I am no teller of tales; but since we have a quiet watch below, shall out with the yarn and appease your curiosity——"

"It is no such thing," I broke in. "It is interest and friendliness, and you know it!"

"Aye, and your pardon, lad," he answered and sighed. "I have grown cynical of men, George, and belief comes hard to my lips; but my heart is sound enough and loves you. You've never been in the west country, by Wrexham and Marchwiell and the Brondreg Hills, and Wat's Dike, along the Welsh country?"

"No nearer than London town," I responded.

"Then take my word for it, no lovelier country may be found, George! My father was a magistrate and a knight, and of latter years had grown wealthy through his shares in the Company of Hudson's Bay. And one day he gave sentence to a poacher for killing a hare. A seaman it was, who had wandered riotously up from Bristol, spending guineas by the way. Guineas gone, the seaman headed for Bristol again, trapping the hedges for meals, and so fell foul of the law and was taken. My father sentenced him to transportation.

"Even the man's name was not known. He was a man with long face, they say, and melancholy eyes and a voice like a roaring wind when he flung out curses; a gold ring fast in his nostrils, and over his heart was

tattooed a crimson bleeding heart. That, and the name he went by, was all the picture I could gain of him.

"Well, into jail he was clapped, cursing and swearing bitter vengeance upon my father, who had sentenced him. Two days later came travelers, shipmen going to Bristol, and they heard of the man and viewed him as he lay in jail. They recognized him for one Trunnel Toby, a man famed for foul deeds and piracies. Word of it came to London, and he was sent for to be hanged at Tyburn as a notable example to other pirates.

"So they took him away, chained him like a beast. How he did it I know not, but he slew both his guards and escaped clear away. And on a Sunday night he came, bringing other rogues with him, to Ravenscroft Hall where my father lived."

Now the hoarseness gained upon Ned Low, so that for a little he sat in silence, and I could hear his dry mouth working. I had by this time caught the drift of what was afoot, and guessed whither his tale led. The telling of it would ease his heart, so I kept still and let him go his own gait. He resumed presently, speaking soft and low.

"There was a lass I loved, George, and since my parents were lonely, often she would come to the hall and spend a day or two. She was spending that Sunday so when this foul Trunnel Toby and his mates arrived. They picked their time, knowing that few of the servants would be about.

"Well, they broke in and slew like dogs gone mad in Summer's heat! They slew and robbed, plundering Ravenscroft as they would ha' plundered any ship on the high seas. Two of the dogs fell under my father's steel ere they pistoled him—Toby himself fired the shot, and that same bullet slew my mother. The dear lass they murdered likewise, and fled with their booty, having horses in waiting.

"And the devils got clear away, George; clear away! They had a ship waiting by Bristol, and Trunnel Toby was captain of her.

"To this I was called home from Oxford. One of the two whom my father slew, lived long enough to tell who and why, and then died. For a fortnight I was like a man out of his wits, and then I fell to work. I raised what money I could, sold off what lands were free and went to London.

"There I bought a stout sloop, armed her

and manned her with the scurviest knaves could be picked up. There was a devil in me then, lad; for all I was just turned twenty-one I made those knaves fear me most bitterly. So we put to sea, and since that day I have never lessened in the search for Trunnel Toby.

"A year, and I was captaining my own ship, a fine, fast ship that we took from a French rover off Brazil. They had little ease who sailed with me, I promise you! We were on the Account sure enough, but we molested no innocent trader, George—only hunted up and down the seas whatever ship Trunnel Toby might be in.

"He heard of it, and others heard of it, for I hanged every man that had sailed with him or shared with him. More than once, as I have told you, I came close to him, but the hound was wary. I made the seas so hot for him that men were afraid to ship under him, and he was forced to take lesser berths. Always he fled from me; for he knew why I was after him, although no one else knew the reason, and he was afraid to face me.

"Ah, but he is a man of blood past reckoning! A fiend in human form, George; I've heard how he has dealt with captive men and women, so that your blood would freeze to imagine it.

"And he's no coward, either. Only last year with some small boats he boarded a Portuguese Indianman in the very harbor o' Funchal, slew every soul aboard her and with the remnants of his men worked her out from under the shore guns. I was there a week later and heard the tale, and tracked him to the African coast.

"Indeed, I found the ship in the Guinea River, up a bit from the English factory at Sierra Leone, and I took her. Every man aboard her I hanged, but Trunnel Toby himself got ashore and fled among the blacks up the river. There I lost him, for I pursued with boats and discovered that he had doubled back to the coast again and escaped me in a ship bound for Virginia with slaves. And since then I have been able to obtain not the slightest trace of him.

"Most like he is in Virginia now. With my share of Franklin's gold I'll buy this ship and start out anew, and I think I'll find him in Virginia, for he's poor and without followers, and even the brethren of the coast are afraid to sail with him for fear I'll trace them down and hang them. And that's the reason behind me, George Roberts."

"You've told it to Polly Langton?" I demanded.

"The Lord forbid!" exclaimed his voice, startled. "I've told it to none save you."

"Then no wonder she deems you a common pirate," I said thoughtfully.

"I forbid you to mention it, George."

"Oh, I'll not! I thank you for the confidence, Ned Low, and if it's ever in my power to aid you, count on me. But for the present—sounds! Here we are chained up like felons, and what's to come of it?"

He made no answer to this. Presently, for all my pondering on that sad story of his and the wreck which had been made of his life, I fell asleep from utter weariness.



IT WAS after night when I wakened, for the trap to the cabin above was open, and David Spry was coming down with a lantern and food and mugs of ale. Ned Low was asleep, and Spry stirred him with his foot until he sat up, then gave us the food and ale and watched us make way with it. His dour, gloomy face was saturnine.

"Wind be falling," he announced, "and we're like to raise the islands tomorrow."

Ned Low glanced up at him.

"You'll raise nothing but the coast of —, you mutinous dog!"

"Aye, by your guidance."

David Spry grinned, and then sobered. He sat him down on an ale-keg and regarded us while he played with his knife in one hand.

"Harkee, masters! The ship's ours. Mistress Polly be in command of she, and Thomas Winter the cap'n——"

"Winter!" I said, choking on my ale. "Are you mad?"

"Nay, un can navigate right well," said David Spry, and grinned again. "Now, Master Winter bain't a man of God, not he! Nor Gunner Basil neither, for all his pretended repentance; for did we not hear un swearing great oaths? Aye. Nor Bose Pilcher neither. And they all say to hang the two of ye and take the ship. We'll not abide this, masters."

We listened to him in stark amazement. He was in deadly earnest, and we realized that he was speaking for the hands forward no less than for himself. But Pilcher——

"Need not call us mutineers, masters," he went on. "We'm be honest men. You be rogues and scoundrels belike; and for the

lady up above we've took the ship over, and to save the blood of honest men from your hands. Ye unregenerate sons o' Belial, take shame to yourselves! We'm be honest British men and sail not wi' murderers and pirates and suchlike."

"Yet you're going to murder us," put in Ned Low.

"Not us, master. Set un ashore, maybe."

The man rose and took our mugs.

"Think o' your sins now, and do 'ee spend the night at prayer. It won't hurt ye none."

He climbed up again through the trap, which he left open, perhaps for convenience. We remained in the darkness. Presently I heard Ned Low chuckle.

"George, sink me if this isn't the richest joke ever perpetrated! Here that lass has taken my own ship from me, Bloody Ned—and is mistress of the ship herself!"

"The joke will end as it began—with death," I said broodingly. "These long-noses have seen through Gunner Basil at last, it appears—that's one good thing! But what d'ye think about Thomas Winter, eh? Who dreamed that the lout could navigate—or is he lying to the others about his ability?"

A whistle broke from Ned Low.

"—me, George, I'd give a thousand pound to know what it was John Russel—"

"Make it five thousand," I said, "and Russel might come back from hell to tell you."

He laughed at that.

"I doubt it. So those devils are figuring on hanging us, eh? I'm surprized that the bosun is with 'em."

"He's not," I said. "I know Pilcher, Ned, and he's a true man. But listen! There's a light above—"

Through the open trap we saw a light in the cabin above. It darted down, a square of radiance, and with the roll of the ship illumined our prison-chamber by flashes, now here, now there. Both Ned Low and I were ironed wrist and ankle, and chains ran from the irons to ring-bolts in the deck, so that we had freedom of movement but no liberty. Between us was a small keg of excellent port, laid aboard for cabin use; and I knew we would not die of thirst or suffer from it again.

Now a voice came to us from the cabin. The words we could not catch, although by

the tone it was the voice of Gunner Basil. Right after it came the clear, high tones of Polly Langton.

"Nay, I will not! I am weary, I tell you, and shall do no talking until tomorrow. Let the two men lie in peace—look to it, gunner; and you, bosun! If harm comes to them you both hang, I swear it! Time enough tomorrow for a talk."

Pilcher made roaring response, perhaps in order that we might hear.

"But, mistress! The men want to know if you be with 'em or no! It's for your sake we have taken the ship—"

"You and the gunner and that man Winter can talk with me at eight bells in the morning, and not before," came her response, and after this, nothing. Presently the light vanished from above.

A bowl or porringer in which some food had been fetched, remained with us. I took this and set it under the spigot of the keg and drew some port. After drinking I passed it along to Ned Low.

"I have a pipe but no tobacco, Ned—"

"Here's 'bacca and a tinder-box."

Neither of us spoke until I had managed, with some trouble, to get the good brown weed alight and had passed the pipe to Ned Low.

"Did you get the catch in her voice, Ned?" I asked. "And she's sparring for time, d'ye mind! Come, Ned, things are not quite so obvious as we thought. The lass is having hard work of it somehow."

"Bah! Nothing of the sort," growled he. "The jade has come to realize that neither she nor Winter can navigate, that's all. She's afraid. By morning, George, they'll make us an offer if we'll navigate for 'em. Wait and see!"

I was not so sure about this, and events proved my doubts well founded.

"Who keeps the keys of these irons, Ned?" I asked suddenly.

He laughed harshly.

"The gunner. There's a spare set o' keys in the chart locker, but small use they are to us here."

By the movements of the ship we soon perceived that the sea was going down, but the night wore away intolerably for us, and the thought of being thus chained like slaves for any longer time was past endurance.

We had worse than thoughts to torment us, however—worse even than the rats which scurried about and over us until

movement frightened them. It was, I think, with the midnight change of watches when the filtered rays of a tiny iron lantern came about the ladder, and then a sound of maudlin cursing and swearing. Down the ladder tumbled the boy Dickon, by some miracle preserving the lantern unhurt as he fell, and picked himself up with more oaths. He was, to put it bluntly, drunk as a lord.

He set the lantern on the ladder and turned to us, cursing and reviling us with the tongue of an arrant pirate. A vast change had come about in him; he had knotted a red kerchief about his head, wore a shirt looted from my bag and had donned my sea-boots which came nearly to his knees. About his waist were belted pistols, though unloaded, and in his hand he held a deadly little gimlet dirk—a round handled weapon, the blade protruding from the fingers of his clenched fist.

"Pirates, is it?" he maundered, coming toward us. "Sink me, but I ha' been cabin-boy to Avery, and this is a poor pack o' thieves and woolsack rogues—there, ye lousy dogs! Wake up and give tongue. An I had my way ye'd walk the plank come sunup; aye, and if the old gunner had his way too!"

With this he fetched me a kick and stood regarding us drunkenly, the devil in his face. Cabin-boy with Avery indeed! Avery had died before the young rascal was breeched.

"Stare at me, dogs!"

He leered at us as he spoke.

"Aye, — ye for cowardly curs! Silly old Langton never dreamed 'twas all cut and dried, eh? Nor you, called Bloody Ned— I'll blood ye, and a pox take ye——"

With this he leaned forward and jabbed that little dirk of his into the calf of Ned's leg. The same instant my foot took him in the waist, all my weight back of it.

"*Woof!*"

The air burst out of him; he went back head first among the boxes, dropping the dirk as he fell. Groaning, holding his hands to his middle, he rose up; then Ned flung the pewter porringer at him and caught him across the eyes. A howl broke from the imp. Catching up the lantern, he scrambled back whence he had come, and his groans died out overhead.

"Sickened him, and well done too!" said Ned, laughing.

He leaned forward, and with his foot raked in the dirk.

"Here's the first symptom of hope we've had, George—aye, I have it. A good little weapon."

"Did the pup hurt you?"

"A scratch. He'd have murdered us if he'd been let alone. Did ye mark what he said about Langton, George? 'All cut and dried,' quoth he!"

I recalled now how Dickon and Gunner Basil had been thick from the very start. It was clear enough that they had fooled Dennis Langton into shipping them; yet we vainly sought a reason until I recalled the tale Pilcher had told me and laid it before Ned Low with some further details that I had forgotten when I first confronted Basil.

"That must be the right of it, Ned!" I concluded. "Gunner Basil served under Avery, d'ye mind? And this talk about knowing where Avery's gold was hid—d'you think it's the same gold we're after?"

"It's not," said Ned stoutly. "I was at the taking of this hoard; none but Franklin and I knew where it was hid. It may well be, however, that Avery buried some other gold about the islands, and that the gunner knew of it. Avery's been dead long years. Yet I don't like the smell of it all, George; to me it looks like a plan ready laid. All cut and dried, said he! I'd give a thousand pound if I knew what it was John Russel wanted to say about Winter——"

"Hist, below!" came a sudden low voice.

We fell silent.

"Below, cap'n! Art well?"

"Aye," responded Ned Low. "who's there?"

"Me—Philip! What can I do for you, master?"

Lord, but how my heart leaped at those words! The black cook!

"Get the keys from the chart locker and loose us from the irons!" snapped Ned swiftly.

Hope thrilled in his voice, and I felt eagerness surge through me. Philip was a true man, and——

A curse, a shrill cry, the sound of trampling feet came to us, and the voice of Gunner Basil poured forth furious oaths. He had come upon Philip, had discovered him aft, and now drove him forward with blows and beery revilings; evidently a cask had been broached forward. And so our hopes died even more swiftly than they had arisen. All became silent up above.

"Well," quoth Ned philosophically, "better luck next time, lad! And at least I have the little dirk."

It was small consolation, to me at least.

VIII

 WITH the morning, suddenly and most terribly, there was laid open before us the whole book of villainy which those above were writing. No, not the whole book either; one page of it was still hidden from us!

David Spry came down to us again, left us food and ale and went his way without saying a word, hurriedly. A little while afterward voices came to us through the trap, which remained open. The first voice which reached us was that of Spry himself.

"I am come to speak for them for'ard," he said. "The bosun is a child o' darkness, and we who be honest men will ha' naught to do with his decisions. I say to your face, Gunner Basil, that we ha' doubt of your regenerate state; and I demand to be heard among ye."

The gunner's whine rose, but with an ugly note to it.

"I accept the burden which be laid upon me; aye, the burden o' doubt and mistrust! For my sins——"

"Stow it," commanded a new voice curtly and with irritated contempt. "Stow it, ye swab! As for you, David Spry, ye are dead right, lad. Aye, sit among us, and welcome."

Light came filtering down to us through the open trap. I stared at Ned Low, and he at me, with open wonder and astonishment. What voice was this? It was new to us; we could not place it. Then even as we stared came the answer to our wondering. Polly Langton's voice floated to us.

"Well, Thomas Winter? Where is the bosun?"

"On deck," returned Winter. "One of us must keep the deck, miss. Will ye sit?"

From Ned Low broke a low ejaculation. Winter, indeed! There was no daft vacancy in this voice; it was the full-throated growl of a seaman, as different from the man's usual tones as day from night. The sickening conviction broke upon me full force.

"Ned, it was a plot from the very start!" I said softly with an oath at my own past blindness. "He and the gunner and Dickon, perhaps others! The man was no half-wit at all."

"We're a trifle late discovering the matter," and Ned Low smiled whimsically. "Now let us have an understanding once and for all."

Polly Langton spoke up coolly, quiet command in her voice, and I could imagine her level eyes sweeping from man to man.

"You have taken this ship from her officers and owners, claiming to do it on my behalf, but without any orders or bidding of mine. Thus far I have consented to the matter, for the ship was in storm and distress. Now speak out your purposes flatly. What mean you to do?"

There was a moment of silence. Ned Low looked at me and made a grimace; here was a morsel of news indeed! We thought that the lass had been a party to our captivity, but now the matter appeared otherwise. As for me I felt a glow of warmth and joy, since it had been hard for me to lose faith in her.

"Mistress," began Gunner Basil, "it be in the purposes of Providence——"

"Stow it!" commanded Thomas Winter. "David Spry, do ye answer the lady."

There was something grim, something significant, in the way this man spoke to Gunner Basil. I remembered how I had overheard him addressing the gunner formerly in the cabin, and instinctively I began to feel a cold chill at thought of the man. Gunner Basil was no baby, but a murderous scoundrel himself; yet the gunner obviously stood in blank fear of this man Winter, whom we had accounted a daft person! Ned Low must have felt something of the same sense, for he murmured to me:

"Mark, 'tis Winter who gives orders! Winter who captains the ship! Winter who navigates her——"

"Why, mistress," broke in the cold voice of David Spry from the cabin above, "we be honest men—some of us at least. Do 'ee mind how, that day Simon and Ezra Blake were murdered, and men lashed, ye cried to us to stand by 'ee against they pirates and bloody rogues? Well, we ha' done so, and that be all."

"All, you say?" spoke out the girl. "What say you, Winter? And you, gunner?"

"Aye," they answered together.

"And what is your purpose now, David Spry?" she demanded. "Do you know why we sail to the Verde Islands?"

"Aye, mistress," he responded. "We ha' heard talk o' gold. We stand with 'ee, I

say, and we be honest men. We want no gold but our pay. We'll not see they pirates do no more robbery an' murder, nor take the ship from 'ee, mistress. We'll ha' no more to do wi' they sons o' Belial an' darkness! Do 'ee say the word now, and we stand with 'ee."

"Oh!" said the girl's voice. "What say you to that, Winter? And you, gunner?"

"Aye," they answered again.

Then her voice leaped out at them.

"Very well. If you be minded to obey me, Winter, go above and take the deck, and send Bosun Pilcher down here."

Ned Low gave me a shove with his foot, and grinned admiringly. I awaited the answer. It came with a scrape of feet, and the heavy tread of Thomas Winter leaving the cabin. Immediately afterward, the girl spoke, but softly, so that we could hardly hear her.

"Gunner, what and who is that man? Since the day we left the Thames, he has been known to all aboard as a man of poor sense, no better than a fool. Now he is lucid, and you obey him, and he navigates the ship!"

"Why, mistress, 'tis the dispensation o' Providence!" replied Gunner Basil in oily tones. "I know him no more than you, but praise be, in the hour o' need he has been lifted up as a horn o' salvation to us! What 'ud we ha' done, else, for a navigator, mistress? If it be not a plain case o' Providence, I know naught!"

Now Pilcher made his appearance evidently, for Polly Langton addressed him bluntly.

"Bose, these other men have declared that they have taken the ship on my behalf, will stand by me and take my orders. What say you?"

"I say now, as I said afore," said Pilcher, "that Cap'n Roberts be no pirate! But as for standing by 'ee, mistress, I say aye to that. What's done is done. I obey."

"Very well; then we are agreed," said the girl. "These are my orders! First, that we complete our voyage and get that for which we have come. Second, that the treasure be divided among those to whom it belongs—me, and Cap'n Low, and Mr. Roberts. Third, that these two gentlemen be kept confined until the division is made, then be given their shares and free passage ashore at the first port we make. Now, lads, speak out! Yes or no?"

3

"That's fair, mistress," said David Spry. "I agree."

"As righteous men," said Gunner Basil, "we ought to hand they over to the law; but I yeasay your orders, mistress. Aye."

"And you, bose?" she asked.

"Aye," said Pilcher.

"Very well. See that it be so done. Who among you elected Winter captain?"

"It was agreement, miss," said David Spry. "He could navigate."

"Very well. It is understood."

The sound of feet and the scrape of chairs told us that the conference was over. I was about to speak when Ned Low, his head cocked on one side, made a gesture of caution. I waited. A moment afterward we caught a soft sound of laughter and the voice of Gunner Basil—shorn of its whine.

"Ha, Dickon! Here's a mug o' wine, ye devil's imp! Now run and tell our cap'n, blast his soul, to step down here and finish the bottle with me. Move, ye — pup!"

A mocking retort from Dickon, and the boy fled on his errand. I sat motionless and stared at Ned Low. We waited expectantly, and were soon rewarded. Winter's heavy tread jarred the deck, and Gunner Basil greeted him with another laugh and an invitation.

"I ha' no time to drink, ye black dog," responded Winter's suddenly masterful voice. "It went well?"

"Aye," said the gunner. "She's after the gold, right enough."

"Good! Then we'll not have to squeeze the location out of her," said Winter. "Play it fine and slip not, or I'll carve the heart out of your carcass, d'ye mind that?"

"But, lad!" cried the gunner. "When this be done, will ye not run to the other island and pick up that gold I told ye of? The gold that Avery buried, his own share it was! No man alive but me knows the place, now that Cap'n Avery be burnin' in hell! What say?"

"Like enough," answered Winter indifferently as if postponing a matter on which he were none too eager. "But, mind ye, we have to make the rendezvous first, lad! We ha' not enough hands to work ship, and will have less. Obey the lass, mind ye! Let her put her gold aboard afore we act. And take good care o' Cap'n Low now; good care! I'll carry him along of us to the rendezvous. There's yet a fortnight afore the *Rose Pink* can be looked for; so, Gunner

Basil, bide patient. If ye spoil my work I'll spread-eagle ye!"

Now both men apparently left the cabin. I drew a long breath and met the gaze of Ned Low, for the moment wordless. But it seemed as if new life had come into him; as if these staggering disclosures had invigorated and heartened him. All the old reckless gaiety back in his eyes, he gave me a grin of sheer, delighted amusement.

"Ha, George! Now we have the right of it, now we have the whole scheme unfolded, sink me else! — me, but the rogues were smart! D'ye see, George, they were stranded in London town most likely or else were waiting for word from their friends. So they shipped aboard us and made a rendezvous with the *Rose Pink* at one o' the islands——"

"Who's ship is she?" I demanded. "Who's this devil Winter, anyhow?"

"—— me if I can figure it, George! The *Rose Pink* is a right good ship o' twenty-two guns; Spriggs had her, but sold her to a Frenchman before he was taken and hanged. Whose she is now, I know not."

"Perhaps Winter knew all along of our errand," I mused.

"Not so. More likely he and the gunner and Dickon shipped with us, meaning to betray us as a prize to the *Rose Pink*; they did not look for so quick a passage as we made, which explains why a fortnight still lacks to the time appointed. Ye see how they ha' made use of these honest fools for'ard? On the way they learned o' what we were after, and Winter is handling the matter so Polly Langton will uncover the gold for him. Cursed clever rogue, ain't he?"

"Too cursed clever for us, Ned. We'd better acquaint the lass with the truth——"

"Tut, tut! She'd never believe us; it would be taken as a ruse to get clear of our irons, lad. Make no mistake, George, the devil is loose aboard here! Bose Pilcher knows it. You heard how meek he spoke, assenting to all that was said! Take cue from him, George, and bide patient."

Ned Low was aroused now and no mistake, and I began to see the man of energy, below that gay and almost insouciant exterior. There was a bite to his words. I verily believe he was enjoying himself, was scenting the battle. Perhaps indeed he had some prescience of that which was to come.

"—— it, I don't intend to stay in this hole a fortnight!" I cried angrily.

"We'll not. Philip will be back when he gets a chance—perhaps when watches are changed and Polly takes the deck. Trust the black man, George!"

"But what the —— can we do even if free?" I demanded. "We've no arms."

Ned Low laughed out at this.

"Ha, George—what'll we do? It'll be a sweet play, I'll warrant you! Mind now, have patience! Leave the business to me."

His tone of confidence irritated me.

"You're —— cocksure about it, Ned. What'll you do then? Out with it!"

"Why, hide honor under necessity, as Falstaff has it!"

He chuckled again.

"When needs must, lad, I can play the pirate very well, I do assure you! Ha' faith, and wait."

"I'm no pirate," I said sulkily, "and sha'n't go on the Account for any man."

He laughed at that, then drew a dismal sigh.

"Heigh ho! Times aren't what they were, George, even in the good old days when Kidd and Avery were in their prime! If we'd lived a fewscore years ago! What ruffling, bold times they were, eh? Sink me if there's any romance at sea these days! Ships in the new fore-and-aft style, all the galleons rotted out, and the brave buccaneers degenerated into rascally thieves who'd slit your weasand for a shilling rather than risk a fight for a thousand pound!"

"Well, a few hours more and Bloody Ned will be walking his own deck again—then hey for villainy! I'll slit weasands my own sweet self, and a kerchief about the head will vastly transform you, George; should take to earrings, like the bosun."

Realizing that he was only playing on my ill humor, I made no response to this.



THE hours dragged past most unbearably, for it was stifling hot down in the lazaret; we both waited impatiently for noon to arrive, but it came on leaden wings. At length we heard cries and the stamping of feet on deck, though what had happened we did not learn at once.

A little later Dickon came into the cabin and began to arrange it for the meals of those who were now aft. The little imp had either forgotten the loss of his dirk or else dared not mention it. Instead of closing the trap, over which he moved the table, he began to shy oaths and hard biscuit down

at us. In the midst of this he gave us news.

"A pox on ye, dogs! Tomorrow morning we'll have the hanging of ye," he shrilled most venomously. "We've raised the land, and by night we'll be hook down. Tomorrow we'll string ye up to a merry tune!"

His head vanished from the opening, and we heard Gunner Basil's voice.

"Ha, Dickon! Make no talk of hanging where the lady can hear, ye imp o' satan! Out with ye now and bear dinner. Here's Pilcher, what's second mate now, to eat wi' me. Ho, Pilcher! Be it true that land yonder be the islands, hey? What says cap'n?"

"Cap'n be ciphering and changing course to make the right island," said Pilcher's voice. "Harkee, gunner! I ha' heard tales of ye afore this, man. Mark, I said no word this morning afore the lass—but I know well enough that you, and the cap'n likewise, aren't no chickens. What's i' the wind, man? Are ye for the Account? If so, here's my hand on it!"

The two men fell into low-pitched talk, little of which we could overhear, until the half-convinced tones of Gunner Basil lifted in argument.

"Do ee listen, Pilcher! There be an article to which all the company, like all companies on the Account, be sworn; and that is not to force no married man to join us; d'ye see? I ha' heard that you be married, Pilcher. The cap'n might be glad of ye, for you know they coasts o' Virginia, whither we'll be bound; but if ye be joining from fear——"

I listened in no little amusement while Bosun Pilcher swore by teeth and toenails that he was not married, hated women as the devil hates holy water and desired to go upon the Account of his free will. He convinced Gunner Basil too, and only a master-liar could have done that thing, especially as the two men disliked each other.

It was obvious that Pilcher was trying to get into the confidence of the rogues and was stopping at nothing to do it. We heard no more, for the gunner discovered the open trap under the table, and with an oath slammed it shut; but we had caught enough to be of great heart to us.

About an hour afterward the trap was hauled open again. That imp Dickon had secured some rock ballast and now began to heave the lumps of stone at us with many foul curses; he would assuredly have worked

us some damage had not Thomas Winter come into the cabin and kicked him out. With Winter was David Spry.

Both of them were in huge glee, and no wonder! For by some miracle, since Ned Low was not at all sure of having run out his easting, the island which had been sighted was no other than St. Vincent itself, the very one for which we were bound. The two men discussed this, from which we learned that before sunset the ship would be anchored, then entered up the log and departed again.

"I'll lay you two to one, George," quoth Ned exultantly, "that they'll go after the gold—take the boats and go—this very night! If they do, we're free."

I would not take his bet, however. Unless we were freed before Polly Langton left the ship I feared that the imp Dickon would pistol us where we lay. And such indeed was his intent, for the lad was bloody-hearted as Winter himself.

IX



NOTWITHSTANDING our hopes of the black cook, Philip, we saw nothing of him then, until later in the afternoon, by the stamping and singing above and by the change of motion in the ship, we understood that all hands were at the braces and the *King Sagamore* was beyond doubt heading up for the harbor.

"They'll pick the northeast haven, that being closest to the treasure," said Ned Low coolly. "Is it rocky about there, George?"

"No; all sand-hills, and two long spits of sand protect the cove," I told him. "Indeed they might go across the end of the island to get the gold, since it can not be over a mile and a half or two——"

"Not they!" And Ned laughed heartily. "They'll row ten mile to avoid walking one. Wait and see!"

"If Philip uses that woolly head of his," I observed, "he'll come aft, get the keys, and free us the minute the anchor goes down. All hands will be busy up above for a spell."

The anchor did not go down in a hurry, however, for the ship tacked about more than once before she was in shape to make the entrance to the bight. Gradually she came to an even keel, we could hear the thunderous roar of Thomas Winter as he

bellowed orders, and presently we were at rest.

Our voyage was done.

Almost at once we were aware of a soft-footed scurrying up above in the cabin. I was minded to call out, but Ned Low restrained me; excitement was upon both of us at thought of Philip there, getting the keys and coming down to let us free.

Philip it was, but in mighty fear, since he had no legitimate business aft. We heard a sudden ejaculation burst from him; then like a blow the voice of David Spry reached down to us.

"What be doin' here, ye black man? Ha, in the cap'n's chests——"

A cry broke from Philip, then the furious thud of a blow. Spry uttered a shout, which must have passed unheard on deck. The two men now began fighting across the cabin, and in the midst of this something fell between me and Ned Low, tinkling on the boards.

"The keys!" cried Ned eagerly. "Grab them, George——"

I found them and closed my fist on the precious things.

Up above the two struggling men came to the deck with a crash, and their legs showed in the opening of the trap. From Philip a choked cry of despair and fear rang out; a moment they lay fighting there at the opening, then came gradually through, and at length fell precipitately, crashing down atop of us headlong.

I saved them from broken necks, but at the cost of being knocked well-nigh senseless. When I had writhed clear, so far as the length of my chains permitted, I saw David Spry kneeling on the chest of the black and whipping out his sheath-knife.

"Enough o' that, Spry!" commanded Ned Low.

Spry looked about and found that gimlet-dirk at his back. He was paralyzed.

"Drop the knife, now! George, George, throttle him, lad!"

Even as the fellow raised a wild yell in his throat, I lunged forward and got him with both hands, dragging him to the deck with me. Now he was beyond reach of the dirk, and knew it, fighting furiously to get at me; while black Philip, twisting to his knees, added his strength to mine.

With never a sound out of him, David Spry fought on until he was black in the face as Philip and then suddenly collapsed.

"Quick, George! Give Philip the keys. Now, cook, loose my wrists, then get back up to the cabin and make all straight, and get for'ard," commanded Ned swiftly. "Look alive, lad; look alive! Not a minute to lose. We'll take care of all here."

Under the spur of his tongue Philip fumbled about for the keys, where they had dropped out of my hand. Panting like a blown horse, he found them and worked at the ironed wrists of Ned Low until a sharp word broke from the latter.

"Done! Enough, lad—up with ye! Leave all to us. Wait for word from us. Quick now!"

Obeying in his blind fashion, Philip leaped for the ladder, planted a final kick in the ribs of the senseless seaman and made the best of his way above.

When he had freed his ankles Ned Low knelt before me and worked on my irons with the keys. Blessed relief! In another moment my wrists were free, and I was rubbing at the torn skin, while Ned freed my ankles likewise.

"Now," I said grimly, "there'll be a reckoning alow and aloft——"

"Softly, softly!" said Ned, and laughed quietly in his throat. "First give me a hand with this godly rogue—thus! Good. Now strip the shirt from him and truss that jaw of his all shipshape."

In no long time we had Spry ironed in Ned Low's place, and so well gagged that nothing but a stifled moan could come from him. He would not soon recover his senses, however.

"Give us a sneaker of that port, lad," said Ned, handing me the bent pewter bowl. "Aye, a good one! Now look ee, George, be not hasty to wrath, as Master Spry might say. They'll not miss this rascal, what with the excitement and all. They'll leave an anchor-watch and turn in all hands soon enough."

A few swallows of wine made us both sense our freedom more acutely.

"You'll try and take the ship tonight then?" I asked.

Ned Low grinned. He was getting my pipe alight, and had trouble with the tinder; but at length he got it drawing, and shook his head.

"Not a bit of it, George! Mind now! We have the run of the ship here below, if we want it. We've all the cabin stores here to hand. Let's eat, drink and be

merry, lad! Let's have a sound night's sleep, keeping alternate watch lest any one comes down, and be ready for the morrow.

"Figure it out for yourself," he went on with an eager earnestness. "They'll take the longboat to row around the point o' the island after that gold, and they'll go at the break o' day. Who'll go? Polly, for one; Thomas Winter, for another. Winter will take the six honest lads from up for'ard to row the boat. He'll leave Gunner Basil here to keep the ship with Pilcher. Take the ship while he's gone, George, and when he comes back we'll have the dog at our mercy! Eh?"

There was sense to this; I was forced to admit it, though somewhat against my will, for further waiting was both dangerous and irksome.

"If things go as you expect," I said, "that's the best plan. Agreed! Then let's get some food broken out before the light fails. Lord, but it's great to be free to stretch again! What if Dickon comes down here, Ned?"

"Clap him in irons."

Ned Low grinned.

"I'll hang that little —, George! I'd sooner fling him overboard, but he'd not drown, mark me! Well, I'll not hang him either, for he's only a lad. Wait and see, George; the rascal may yet hang himself."

"And so saye Jack Ketch a job," I said. "All right, Ned! I agree. Now to dine."

We were not disturbed again all that evening, for it appeared that owing to the heat and the calm of the bay dinner was served on deck. We ate our fill, luxuriated in our freedom and let our captive snore. From the silence above, all hands were sleeping.

Ned Low had curled up and gone to sleep, and I, on watch, was beginning to nod, when a slight noise sounded above, and then came the voice of Polly Langton softly.

"Are you there, Mr. Low—Mr. Roberts?"

I touched Low's face, and he sat up.

"Aye, mistress!" I responded. "And we are like to stay here a while, thanks to you!"

"Oh, you must not—you don't understand!"

There was a break in her voice.

"If I had done anything else they would not have obeyed me! Don't you see, I had to act as I have done, in order to keep where

I am? When we get back with the treasure, I shall have you released at once, and then——"

"You've been badly fooled, Miss Polly!" I spoke out, throwing off Ned's warning hand. "Winter and the gunner have a rendezvous at one of the islands with a pirate ship; they are using you to get the gold, then they mean to take this ship and join their comrades. Go with them and bring back the gold, and trust all to us. Make them take the bosun with you, and do you have a talk with Pilcher, for he knows the whole game. He can give you proof enough of everything. But be careful! Don't let Winter suspect that you know——"

"Ah—I hear some one—I dare not stay!"

She was gone again, and what effect my words had upon her we could not tell. Although we listened for a while we could hear nothing. Finally Ned Low whispered to me,

"Why the — did you tell her to take Pilcher?"

"We don't need him," I responded. "She may."

"True enough," mused Ned Low. "Sink me if I don't believe her, George! Aye. She's handled things well enough, all considered. She's none of your patched and powdered fools who cry, 'La, la!' and fly into hysterics at the sight o' blood; but an honest Devon lass, with hard good sense and sober wits. George, I take back all my harsh words and thoughts about her!"

"Then go to sleep again," I bade him. He obeyed, laughing softly to himself.



THE remainder of the night passed quietly. David Spry came to himself and tried to shake off his irons, but soon relapsed into immobility. The more I thought about Polly Langton's words to us the more I admired the girl's good sense in acting just as she had done. I could see now, in the light of those few sentences from her lips, that she had done the best possible thing for all of us.

She had of course played into Winter's hand without knowing it. Those poor "honest fools" up forward, panicky over being led astray by bloody pirates and murderers—as they considered me and Ned—had undoubtedly been prodded and urged all along, ever since we weighed anchor, by Winter and the gunner; in dealing with those fanatics the girl had been walking in

slippery places and was aware of it. So all in all I felt greatly heartened by her few words; and when I waked Ned and laid myself down to sleep it was with the feeling that we owed a large debt to Polly Langton.

Morning came at last. Even before the first break of day, we were roused by the activity overhead. Obviously Winter intended to be off and away with the light, and our only fear was that he would visit us to make sure of our safety. As we later learned, we had been placed in the keeping of David Spry, and all hands were too filled with thoughts of gold to waste worry over what had become of Spry. Even Winter could not be blamed for supposing his prisoners well ironed and stowed; for he, playing a deep and desperate game—deeper even than we yet knew—was that morning on the verge of success, with the gold all but his.

Ned and I broke our fast very pleasantly; and though poor Spry's eyes besought us to have pity on him we dared not loosen his gag, promising to take care of him after a bit. Nor did we have any particular desire to ease his lot, since he had certainly made ours hard enough when he had the mastery.

The stern window of the cabin above was open. We heard the men embark as soon as there was light enough to pilot the boat from the harbor. Water and provisions were placed aboard the boat, and the deep voice of Thomas Winter penetrated to us with his final orders. Then at length silence ensued, and we knew the boat had departed.

"Now, George!"

Ned Low drew a deep breath, and then laughed out gaily.

"The question remains as to how many went along! Be quiet a while, lad. Give 'em a chance to get out o' the harbor. Beshrew me if I don't pistol that cursed Gunner Basil, and we do not want them to hear the shot."

"First get your pistol," I reminded him dryly.

He caught my arm. Steps sounded above, and immediately after, the voice of Gunner Basil himself, evidently addressing that imp Dickon.

"What's that ye want, Dickon lad—wine? Well, well, fill your cursed skin if ye will! Hast deserved it, ye limb o' Satan! Here, pour me a stoup likewise; I'll wash my mouth clean o' that — sanc-

timonious talk. This time to-morrow, lad, we'll ha' the gold aboard, and hey for the Indies!"

"Here's luck, — yer eyes!" shrilled the boy's voice.

"Sweet lad!" murmured Ned Low.

Now Dickon vomited a volley of oaths, demanding to know why he had not been taken along with the others.

"The black scum of a cook must go," he swore roundly, "and that dog Pilcher, and they six godly fools from for'ard; eight sons o' dogs at the oars, wi' the cap'n and his lass in the starn—and me left here! — their eyes, I hope the — boat sinks with all hands!"

Gunner Basil fell a-laughing at these oaths and valorous wishes.

"You and me, younker," he responded, "got to stick here idle while they work. Aye, the cap'n knows Gunner Basil can lay a gun! Guzzle away, ye varlet, and I'll go set me a fishline for'ard. There be mighty fish in these waters."

For a while there was silence. Ned and I conferred together, being in no haste, and were delighted by the news we had gained. Those two were alone on board, which made things so much easier for us. Basil alone was sufficient to guard the ship, and Winter had wanted all the hands possible along to work out the treasure, as well as to row the longboat, which was a heavy craft.

All of a sudden we heard a satanic chuckle from above, and then the head of Dickon appeared in the trap. The boy was half-drunk, and I looked up to see a pistol in his hand. Staring down into the darkness, he could for the moment see no details.

"Now, ye dogs!" he shrilled at us in maudlin tones. "Now ye have it, Bloody Ned! I'll bleed the both of ye, blast yer — souls!"

Ned and I must have realized at the same instant that the little devil was run amuck. We sprang up together, but collided and fell back. He, weaving the pistol about in his unsteady hand, uttered a wild laugh and more curses.

"I'll bleed ye, ye dogs!" he went on. "I'll show ye who's the best pirate aboard this — ship, — ye! Take that! And there's more for ye where it come from——"

The roar of the pistol, volleying smoke and flame in our very faces, proved his words. Only that collision with Ned had saved my life, for the thing bellowed not a

yard above my head. I was already heaving for the ladder again, and this time made it, and was up at the murderous little wretch while he still peered through the smoke.

He uttered a strangled cry and rolled aside, but I was through the trap and had him. And how the drunken rascal fought me! He gouged and bit with the venom of a very fury, until I got hold of his fallen pistol and slashed him over the head with the barrel. That laid him quiet at last, knocking the senses out of him.

I rose, and then found that Ned had not followed me.

"Ned!" I cried. "Ned! You're not hit, lad?"

His head rose through the trap, a grim look in his face.

"The bullet slew David Spry," he said, and came to his feet, looking down at the boy. "Sink me, but I could hang this little murderer——"

"No time," I broke in. "That shot will fetch the gunner, Ned! Get your pistols!"

"Right," he cried, and whirled about.

Even as he started toward the lockers, Gunner Basil came running down the passage with a shout to Dickon. There was nothing else to do; I went for him with the empty pistol, and he stopped short in the doorway, his pale eyes popping at sight of me and Ned. His hand flew to the pistol in his belt, but I was ahead of him, and sent him staggering with one shrewd blow in the face.

He tried to run for it, with me at his heels, and got to the companionway. Then as he started up for the deck I had him by the leg. He drew his pistol and fired down, and the bullet actually nicked my cheek and cut the skin of my shoulder, so that he pulled free of me.

None the less I got him, for I reached the deck only a step behind him and gripped his shirt, and he whirled at me with knife up. I caught his wrist, and we went to the deck together, while Ned Low seized the pistol I had dropped and waited with butt reversed. His chance came as we rolled into the scuppers, and under the smash Gunner Basil relaxed in my grip.

I rose, panting, and regarded the man. His face was smeared with blood, and though the eyes were closed that yellowy parchment face was evil to see. Ned Low touched my arm.

"Get a coil o' light line for'ard, George. We'll tie up him and the boy."

Breathing heavily, yet mighty rejoiced to be free, I went forward and got the line. There I paused to glance around, and the pause cost us dear in the end. The *King Sagamore* lay in the quiet, landlocked bay, with nothing in sight but the long sandspits to seaward and the sandhills around. We were but a cable-length from the shore.

A sudden shout from Ned Low roused me. I caught sight of Dickon, just risen from the companionway, and Ned leaping at him. The boy ran like a hare, evaded Ned and got to the rail. With one clean plunge he was overboard.

Ned jumped to the fire-rail, caught out two of the teak pins and flung one. It drove within a foot of Dickon's head as he came up and struck out for shore. The little fiend twisted his head and looked up at us.

"I'll bleed ye yet, ye dogs!" he screamed shrilly.

Angered, Ned loosed another pin, but Dickon saw it coming and dived. Escaping it, he came up again and struck out for shore. Then I perceived something else, and flung a shout at him.

"Quick, boy! Sharks astern!"

True enough; a black fin was cleaving the water, and another after it. Dickon redoubled his efforts, and made so great a splashing that he got into the shoal water safe, and a moment later staggered up on the sand. He paused there only to shake his fist at us, then turned about and ran across the sand, and presently was gone over the nearest hill.

Ned Low and I bound Gunner Basil hand and foot, gagged him and lashed him to the foot of the mainmast. The ship was ours again.

"And what about Dickon, Ned?" I demanded.

He shrugged, reading my thought.

"The chances are ten to one, George, that he'll not find Winter and the men. And if he does, what of it? We have the ship."

X



IN THE course of the day Ned Low and I got David Spry decently buried and reoccupied our own cabins. Likewise we noosed a huge turtle swimming alongside, for the season was just beginning and the island waters were thick with the creatures, and we dined famously.

We laid out loaded muskets and pistols with which to receive Winter when he came, and all the while the pale eyes of Gunner Basil watched us. We left him bound and gagged all day, then fed and watered him and took him below, ironing him where we had lain. He had not a word to say.

It was late in the afternoon when we descried a boat, under sail, coming up the bay. The glass showed it to be one of the island boats, with four black islanders aboard; at sight of us they were fearful, but I stood in the shrouds and signaled them, so that they came on and rowed alongside. I could speak their tongue to some extent, and when they came aboard we had a conference.

They were simple fellows, come hither after turtle. I told them that our men had mutinied and gone off in a boat but would return, and that we wanted a dozen islanders to ship aboard us as far as Lisbon. They were suspicious until I gave them what money we had and told them my name, and that I had visited their island of San Nicholas more than once.

"Your governor knows me," I told them, "also Senhor Gonsalvo, the former governor. They will tell you that I am an honest man of my word. How soon can you get the men here?"

They talked together, and decided to return at once to San Nicholas, saying that they could be back the day after tomorrow in the morning, barring bad weather. Ned Low made me a sign of delighted assent, and so we agreed upon it. Before sunset the blacks were rowing out of the bay, and so departed.

Although Ned and I kept watch and watch that night, we saw no signs of Winter coming back. Sunrise was at hand, when we were getting breakfast in the galley, when Ned stepped to the rail, then called me and ran aft for the glass. Sure enough, there was a blot out between the sandspits.

When we had inspected that blot through the glass we stood staring one at the other in blank amazement. For the tube showed us that this was the longboat indeed, with a figure stooped aft, bailing the water out of her, which we took to be that of Polly Langton; only two others were aboard her, and these at the oars—cook Philip and Bosun Pilcher. They were rowing her slowly and wearily, as men who had been

long hours at the task, and the boat was low in the water.

"Stove in, George," said Ned Low, wrinkling up his eyes perplexedly. "Now what's it mean, I wonder? Where's Winter and the other six?"

So slowly did they come on that it was after sunrise when they drew near, and Polly waved to us. The two men were too exhausted to wave, although we caught a faint grin from Philip and saw the bosun nod his head to us as the faces strained upward. The boat was half-filled with water, and we saw that she was badly stove in the bows.

In fact, so weary were all three of them that they hardly made any comment upon finding us two alone there and the ship ours. The two men crawled over the rail and sank down, gasping for breath. Polly leaned against the rail and looked at us with a tremulous smile upon her lips. Her hair was fallen about her cheeks, and she was very lovely.

"Where's Winter?" I asked.

She nodded toward the sand-hills.

"Coming. We ha' been rowing most o' the night——"

"Rest then," said Ned. "Come, George! I'll be cook. You bring ale."

I fetched some ale, and Ned produced biscuit and turtle-steak. We asked no questions, but waited, and when she had eaten a little the girl suddenly looked up at us.

"Gentlemen, I ask your pardon, for—for everything," she faltered. "I ha' learned the truth——"

Ned took her hand and smoothed it, looking into her eyes.

"Dear lass," he said gravely, "why speak so? Sure, we owe our lives to your wit and good sense. Had you not taken the head of things——"

Her eyes widened and came to me.

"But—but they used me as a tool!" she said. "Bose Pilcher has told me all, as you told me last night, Mr. Roberts! It is all true about that man Winter——"

"Does he suspect that you know?" I demanded.

"No, no! He was glad enough when I offered to come back in the boat and bail her——"

"Then where's the gold?"

Ned broke out in a laugh.

"Come, lass, forget all else and tell us what's happened?"

"Aye, he has the gold," she said, color coming into her cheeks. "We found it just where the directions said. But in coming ashore we ran on a sunken rock that hurt the boat; to fetch back the gold in her was impossible. So Winter remained to bundle it into canvas and carry it across the headland to the bay here. He was too excited over the gold to protest my departure, and sent Pilcher and cook Philip with me. He is sure that Bose has joined in his schemes, you see. He'll be here some time today."

"Good!" cried Ned joyfully. "You, lads, get for'ard and sleep while you can. First, however, help get the boat hauled in, and I'll go to work on her. Canvas and pitch will make her tight enough to use in a pinch."

When the boat was hauled aboard Pilcher and the cook stumbled off to sleep, and Ned fell to his task, whistling blithely.

I got a spare sail rigged aft for a sun-shelter and remained talking with Polly Langton, who refused to go below. She was much concerned to have matters set right between her and us—but no more anxious on this head than was I myself.

From Pilcher, I discovered, she had gained a very accurate understanding of the whole situation—including her worthy uncle's past history, since the bosun had held back nothing. However it must have shocked her, she was now facing too stern realities to spend much thought on the past.

Now I went over with her the varied details of the voyage, pointing out how this and that had come about; and, having the perspective of distance and an awakened mind, Polly could clearly enough discern the right and wrong of things. Of Ned Low I could say very little, but I told enough to make her see that he was not altogether the bloody pirate he had been named.

In an hour we were talking and laughing together as friendly as ever or perhaps more so, and there came up mention of her native Devon. At that she cried out bitterly:

"Oh, if we could only get away from here before the men come back! I want none of that gold. I would it were all at the bottom of the sea! And I am afraid of Winter. If you had heard and seen him when they brought the gold up out of the hole you'd have thought he was more devil than man! Can't we work the ship out now, at once?"

"It might be done," I said, casting an eye at the bay. There's a light air off the land—Oh, Ned! Ned!"

Ned Low had finished his work on the boat and came at my call, pipe in one hand and mug of ale in the other. Very merry and laughing he was, too.

"Ned, the lass fears Winter. And I am none so sure that it were wise to lie here all today and tonight. He took a brace of muskets with him, and pistols. What d'ye say to letting the gold go hang, slipping the hawser, and——"

"Not by a good deal!" exclaimed Ned coolly.

He regarded Polly with a smile, his brown face very frank and cheerful to see.

"I don't blame ye, Polly, for wanting to be rid of it all and away from here; but, lass, gold is mighty useful in the world. Once away from the *King Sagamore*, once back in London or Devon or where ye will, a few thousand guineas is a mighty fine thing wherewith to fight the world, the flesh and the devil! If the clergy had each a pocketful o' money there'd be less talk of hell and more of heaven—I'll wager ye never heard a bishop talk of hell now! Nor ever will. We see the world quite different through gold spectacles, lass——"

"A brave dissertation, Ned," I broke in dryly, "but come to the point!"

He pointed overside with his pipe, to where several large black fins were slowly cleaving the water.

"There y'are—come to pick the leavings of our turtle! What better guard could we have against Winter tonight, George? Without a boat he can't reach us, and a musket-ball or two will do us no harm. So fear not; we are safe from him and all others!"

"As for the gold, I mean to have it from him; that's one reason for not leaving. The second is like unto it—I'll not leave him wi' that gold in his paws, d'ye mind? I need the gold, and I'll not see him rewarded with it. Nay, leave him ashore for a day or so without fresh water or food or strong liquor, and hear how the dog'll whine to us! We'll give him bread for gold, and when the last red round piece is down below I'll slip the cable and set our black island men to the braces and leave Thomas Winter here to think on his sins.

"For your sake, lass," he continued, "I'll not try to hang him, since that might make

or lead to trouble. We'll leave him marooned and be content wi' the gold."

 LEAVING him to argue the matter with Polly, I took his mug and went forward to get some ale. While I was there, Pilcher came yawning on deck. I paused for some talk with him, and he told me what had finally and terribly convinced the girl. Under the jubilant excitement of finding the gold Winter had momentarily flung off his mask, telling the lass that he meant to have her as well as the gold; he had charged Pilcher to watch her closely and to lock her into her cabin on reaching the ship.

What Winter had said to Polly Langton was enough to set any man's blood to boiling. Then and there I changed my mind about leaving the bay.

"Bose, who's this fellow Winter?" I demanded. "He's no riffling jack playing in luck. There must be a name to him that men would know."

"Aye, sir, but I could never come at it."

Pilcher shook his gold earrings.

"Gunner Basil knows him, I be certain; no one else. Where be gunner and Dickon, sir?"

I told him of Dickon's escape.

"Gunner's ironed down below. You must have deceived them all finely, bosc! Winter really thought you'd go on the Account with him, eh?"

"Gunner be an old fool," Pilcher grinned at me. "Yet there's murder in the heart of un, mark that! The tales he's poured into me would shiver your soul, Mr. Roberts! If he be not a liar he ha' seen and done such things as 'ud melt a Turk!"

"Go down and talk to him," I suggested. "Perhaps you can get something out of him about Winter. That man's a pirate, a known man, I'm certain of it."

"Be goin' to hang 'un, sir?"

"Aye. You might get the line and block ready now, too."

I went aft with the ale and informed Ned and Polly bluntly that I was for staying until the men returned. Then Ned Low saw what the bosun was doing at the main and questioned me about it.

"Making ready for Winter," I said. "The man hangs."

"Why so changed?" said Ned, laughing. "Would you jeopardize us all?"

"He insulted the lass here," I said. "Make no more talk about it now."

Polly Langton looked at me, and the color came into her face. We must have looked mighty humorous, for Ned Low began to laugh again and went forward. When he was gone, the little lass spoke softly.

"You must not bear him such ill, Mr. Roberts——"

"No protests if you please!" I told her frankly. "Pilcher told me what was said, and I'll give that rascal what he deserves if it kills me! But it won't. Before we leave here the rogue hangs."

She looked troubled, but made no more mention of the matter.

All this while we were keeping a sharp eye upon the sand hills, but in vain; and since Winter and the six men could not come near the little bay without being seen, we were safe in taking our ease.

After a little Philip appeared and came aft. We were prompt to thank him for his loyalty, and for those keys which had near cost him his life to obtain. The negro was delighted with our words of praise, and Ned promised him more substantial reward later, when occasion offered.

I had never seen Ned so full of good spirits as this morning. Polly began to take all in jest his announced purpose of buying out her share of the ship and going forth once more on the Account, and small wonder; no man ever looked less like a pirate than Ned Low that morning. Even when he stated that he would transship her at Lisbon she thought him joking.

So came noon, and Philip brewed us a mighty stew of green turtle in the regular island style, which we hugely enjoyed. Pilcher had held some conversation with Gunner Basil, but it was all one-sided. He reported that the gunner would utter nothing save oaths, and those unfit for repetition.

We had just lighted our pipes, and cook Philip was clearing away the meal from the shelter aft, when Polly Langton looked up and changed countenance suddenly. I followed her gaze, and came to my feet.

"Stand by, Ned! Here they are."

We stood at the rail, watching the seven bowed men coming over the crest of the sand toward the bay. Seven? No, there was one more following them; eight in all, and the eighth was the cabin-boy, Dickon.

XI



FOREMOST of the eight came Thomas Winter. He and the six men after him had flung away their arms, even to pistols; they bore each of them a rude canvas sack, some on shoulders, others in arms, and by their weariness under that dragging weight of wealth we knew how great was the treasure they had unearthed. Dickon alone carried no burden.

"Dickon has told them his tale—yet they come!" exclaimed Ned Low, watching the scene with frowning perplexity.

We shared his uneasy wonder, all of us. We had expected anything but this open coming. It could not be doubted that Winter now knew we held the ship, and he probably thought the gunner dead; he could have had little hope of Pilcher and the cook having subdued us. Yet he came on openly, the six men behind him, bringing their golden treasure down to the shore of the bay! And all unarmed, too, except for knives.

"I looked for them to attack us tonight somehow," I observed, "but not for such a coming. Watch out for tricks, Ned!"

"Yes, yes!" added Polly earnestly. "Don't let him trick you!"

"Fear not," said Ned Low quietly. "I want but that gold of him, and he can have the island! And let him try his tricks, now that we know him for what he is."

The eight came filing down to the sandy shore of the bay, a scant cable's length from us.

"Way enough, lads!" cried Thomas Winter, dumping his load into the sand. In the hot stillness of the bay, with not a breath stirring aloft, each sound reached us plainly; the hot panting of the men, as one by one they added their burdens to the pile; the oaths and curses of Dickon, toiling in their wake; the dull sound of clinking metal as the pile of gold grew complete. More than one of the godly rogues vented himself of profane words as shoulders and arms were rubbed.

"Gold makes a change, even as I told you, in men," commented Ned Low. "Mark those rascals, George! A day or so ago they were pious, regenerate dogs—and now look at the flame in their faces, the passion in them!"

"More like thirst," commented the girl practically. "The water in the boat's

cask was foul. And they have thrown away even the provisions in order to carry the gold."

That was true. The group of men stood there staring at us, and even in the face of Winter we could read the hopeless despondency of a beaten man. They had neither water, food nor arms. We, who held the ship, held everything.

At length Winter came down to the water's edge and hailed us.

"Ahoy! Pilcher, are you there, bosun?"

"Aye," roared back bosc. "Here and with the cap'n, ye — dog!"

Winter stared at us from his long face.

"I hadn't thought ye'd go back on us, bosc," said he, and shook his head. "Be you with 'em too, Miss Polly?"

She would not answer him. Ned Low made laughing response.

"Come aboard, Thomas Winter! Come aboard, with the men. Swim, lads, swim! The ale is warm, but hearty; and here's fine fresh turtle, and fish for the taking! Come aboard, lads, and never mind the sharks."

The other men and Dickon were by now sprawled in the sand in various attitudes of despair. But Thomas Winter stood and stared at us.

"Master Low, ye'd never see us starve an' die o' thirst?" he cried.

"Aye, and with a good heart!" said Ned cheerfully. "There's water to the south end of the island, lads. Take up your gold and go for it."

Sullen curses from the men showed how his words bit, and how they themselves had changed from their former godliness. Ned Low laughed at them.

"Come, come, regenerate hearts!" he derided. "Shall I have up Gunner Basil out of his irons to give you some godly exhortation?"

"Master, we be poor, unlucky men," returned Thomas Winter mournfully. "There be no gettin' around it; you ha' beat us. We ha' throwed the main, and you ha' beat us despite all. Will ye not ha' mercy on us?"

"Not I," said Ned Low blithely. "What about your rendezvous with the *Rose Pink*, Master Winter? Do you still think to pick her up, and carry these good honest lads off to a life o' piracy?"

I watched the men at this, hoping to find that this was news to them; but they,

clustered about Dickon, merely glared at us. Evidently they had thrown off all restraint. The very sight and touch of the gold had corroded their souls. Thomas Winter only wagged his long head and wiped sweat from his brow.

"You ha' beat us," he said again. "We ha' no water, no food, and will die like dogs out here i' the hot sun. Take us aboard, master, even if it be in irons!"

"Not I," quoth Ned Low, tamping tobacco into his pipe. "I want ye not. You have gold there in plenty. Eat it, drink it! Make a canopy of it to shade yourselves from the sun! We'll be gone from here tomorrow morning, and ye can enjoy the gold to the full."

A sudden transport of rage shook Winter.

"Gizzard and guts! Will ye have no mercy, — ye?" he roared out.

"Should have thought of that yesterday," I broke in, and he stared at me as if he had never seen me before. "You dog, Winter! I'll see you hanged for what you said to the lass. Mind that! I'll see that the island men know you for pirates, and the first king's ship we speak will come to take you off."

"Master Roberts, you'll never do that?" he returned as if struck aghast by the possibility. "We didn't do no harm to you, sir—only put ye in the bilboes, so to speak, for a day or two. We be main sorry for all we ha' done, masters; aye, we be main sorry! We be naught but poor sailormen, masters. Ye'd not bear malice against us? And now you ha' the ship and all's well, you'd never go off and maroon us here?"

"Aye," said Ned imperturbably. "Like the dogs you are!"

"Do ee speak to un for us, mistress!"

Brazenly Winter addressed himself to Polly.

"After all, mistress, we be Englishmen! Maybe we ha' been tempted; aye, it's true enough, the yellow gold tempted us, mistress! But we be not all bad. Do ee speak a word to cap'n, and he'll hear it. We'll work ship good and faithful, we will. Aye, he can have us in irons for the mutineers we be, so he don't leave good men here to die o' thirst! Do ee speak a word to 'un, do now!"

Polly stood and looked at him, her eyes inflexible. Ned Low laughed again.

"She'll not speak the word, Winter, nor

would I listen. Ye'll set no foot on this ship again."

Thomas Winter stood desolate, with head hanging, for a long moment. Then he heaved a great sigh and looked up.

"It be main hard on us, masters!" he said slowly. "Will ye make no terms?"

"Not with you, Winter," answered Ned, who by this time had his pipe alight and stood puffing calmly. "I'll take the men aboard and will hand them over for trial; that's their wages, if they want to come."

"Where be David Spry, cap'n?" spoke out one of the men.

"Dead," I responded. "Murdered by Dickon, there—"

"A foul lie, mates!" screeched young Dickon. "Spry were murdered like poor Mr. Russel—knifed un in the back, Master Roberts did! Don't believe un! It's but to murder us he wants us aboard!"

I disdained to answer this. Among the men there arose a violent altercation. Some were for accepting Ned's terms, anxious to get away from the island at any cost; others called Ned and me bloody murderers and would not allow it. Then one of the men leaped up hotly.

"We all stick or we all go!" he cried out. "Who says stick?"

He and three others voted to stay. Two of the men cried that they would come aboard, and he turned on them angrily.

"No, ye don't!" he cried. "All or none it is. We stick with ee, Winter!"

Ned frowned at this, for I think he had counted on some of the men helping to work ship, and this attitude of theirs rather took him aback. Winter, who had listened to them in silence, now faced us again and spoke.

"You ha' the whip hand of us, master," he said resignedly. "But if ye will have no pity on us, will ye not barter us even for the gold? Give us biscuit and some rum, and water enough to last until we ha' found the springs, and set a price on it!"

Now I perceived by the light in Ned's eyes that it was for this he had been waiting all the time, for he was intent upon getting that gold aboard. One of the men cried out for shoes, since the sand blistered their bare feet, and another for hats.

"It might be done, lads," rejoined Ned Low, not too eagerly. "Ye have seven bags o' gold there. For the top four of those bags I'll set ashore all the things ye

desire; and for the bottom three bags I'll leave the longboat behind when we sail i' the morning. What say ye to that?"

"The boat's stoye!" said Winter.

"Aye, but I've patched her, and ye can clap another patch over. What say ye now?"

Winter turned and stepped back to the men. There was a hoarse discussion for and against the offer, since certain of the men had no mind to hand over all the gold. Winter, however, argued with them at length, showing them the hopelessness of their condition.

Polly and I came back under the awning of sail, and Ned joined us.

"Winter has enough sense to know he's beaten," he observed complacently.

"Be careful of him," said Polly slowly. "Be careful! Let the gold go and put to sea now, or he'll play us some trick yet."

"Not he," and Ned chuckled heartily. "Hark to 'em arguing about it! Why, lass, they haven't so much as a pistol among 'em! It'd be a sin and shame to leave all that gold behind; your gold, that your uncle died to leave you his share of, honestly bought; and the gold poor John Russel died for, and his share ours too! Eh, George? Why so solemn?"

"Gold gets paid for," I said. "Oh, I'll be glad o' my share, Ned—but gold gets paid for. Some pays in work and sweat and gets little, like I've done these years at sea; but I've got better things than gold. Some pays in roguery and gets much, and think it the biggest thing in life; but the gold decays on 'em, and they find it's not so big after all."

"Gold don't decay," said Ned briskly, and clapped me on the shoulder. "Ha, George, so art still a philosopher, eh?"

"And I think George has the right of it," said Polly, then blushed red. "I mean Mr. Roberts—"

"Na, nay!" said Ned, laughing. "It's George and Ned and Polly among us three, lass, why not? Aren't we friends and comrades together? If we be free and easy, it's all in good comradeship."

"What about Dickon?" I demanded. "You'd not take him aboard, even if the men come?"

"No. I had meant to leave him out of the offer," said Ned, and knit his brows. "I want those two men if they'll come; we'll have need of them. We must work

the ship around to the south end of the island and take on fresh water, too. We'll need those men, George. But Dickon stays here, the foul little beast! Gunner Basil we'll take with us—"

"Ahoy, cap'n!" called out the deep voice of Winter.

We went to the rail, and found him ankle-deep in water, staring at the ship.

"Agreed, cap'n," he called, "on one condition—that ye let Gunner Basil come free to us. He knows where there be more gold. We can get it i' the boat and join the *Rose Pink* if we ha' no bad luck. That's our best offer, cap'n, and I ha' sweat makin' them agree to it."

"Done with you, Winter," said Ned Low promptly. "Now listen well! Those men o' yours shall retire a hundred feet to the top o' that little sand-hill. You wait for us where you are. At the first sign o' treachery, you'll be shot, and those men with you. Understand that, do you?"

"Aye, sir; but why talk so?" Winter looked astonished. "I be not treacherous, master! It's mortal good o' you, says I, to be so main kind to us—wi' boat and all! Bain't that so, lads? Come, lads, gi' the master three cheers!"

Not they; the six men were again vehemently discussing Winter's offer to them, two begging to be let go aboard the ship, the other four dissenting violently. Dickon took no share in that talk, but sat chewing on a stick to ease his thirst, glowering savagely at the ship.

"You're going to make the barter now, Ned?" I asked.

He nodded, beaming gaily.

"Aye, lad! Get the gold aboard and stowed. Then by morning most like all six of those rogues will beg to be took away on my terms. We ha' the sharks for watchdogs, mind ye! It's all safe enough. Wait now, and you'll see; I'll take no chance of that dog tricking me."

Under his assuring confidence, Polly's uneasy look vanished, and I gave over all protest. Indeed, the thought of that gold coming aboard us had a sort of necromancy that bewitched us all with its wizard light.

We turned to in the waist and got the boat into the water. Winter sang out to know when we would release Gunner Basil, and Ned told him in the morning before we sailed; with which Winter had to content himself, taking our word on the matter.

Finding that the boat was well patched and worthy, we got into her some bags of biscuit and other stores, with rum and a breaker of water and everything that could be useful to the rascals save firearms. Winter anxiously demanded if we would leave the boat in the morning likewise, to which Ned assented.

"Boat and gunner together, Winter! Now get your men up the hill."

Ned turned to us.

"George, you and the bosun take pistols and row the boat ashore. Philip, you stop here at the rail wi' the muskets handy, and let fly if you see anything amiss."

His scheme was safe enough, it appeared. Pilcher and I got down into the boat, put out an oar each with pistols at our feet, while Ned sat in the stern with two more pistols, so if need were our pistols could account for six of the rascals. Meantime Dickon and the six men had retired as commanded to the crest of a little sand-hill a hundred feet back from the water.

"Give way!" said Ned, seating himself.

He looked up and waved a hand laughingly.

"Fare you well, Polly! We'll bring you gold when we come again."

"Be careful!" she warned once more.

We headed the boat for the shore and heaved her slowly through the water. Presently her nose scraped. Thomas Winter caught her by the bow, and as Pilcher and I stepped out, gave a tremendous pull that brought her a quarter-length up on the sand.

"Now," said Ned Low, cocking his pistol, "watch yourself, you dog! Take out the stuff and throw in the gold. Pistols, George, and watch him!"

Thomas Winter, his long horse-face adrip with sweat, gave us a reproachful look.

"Can ee not see when a man be playin' fair?" he said, and stooped over his task.

Indeed it seemed a bit ridiculous that three of us should wait there with our pistols in hand while one man labored. Winter put his giant strength to work with a will and heaved the stuff ashore until at length he had the boat cleared. Then, wiping his brow, he dropped in the sand for a brief rest.

At this instant we caught a cry from the men on the sand-hill.

"Ho, master! Ho, cap'n! Wilt take me and Jeff aboard?"

"Aye, that we will!" sang out Ned Low, who still sat in the boat's stern.

We heard a cry from Polly. Among the men on the hill arose something of a scuffle. Two of them were trying to break away, the others were restraining them. Winter paid no heed to this, but lay panting, his eyes closed.

Then the two men got free and began to run, the others hot after them as they leaped down the hillock. The two struck at their pursuers, who followed at their heels, cursing and struggling. Ned Low heaved up his pistol.

"Let 'em go, you rascals!" he cried.

At that Thomas Winter heaved himself up and looked. Then his stentorian voice roared.

"Stand back, ye villains! Back, or I'll break your blasted heads——"

The two foremost came running to us, the others still at their heels. Ned hesitated to fire, as did Pilcher and I. From the ship Philip let fly with a musket, the ball going high. A cry broke from one of the men running to us.

"Don't let un stop us, cap'n! We'm coming——"

Winter roared at them again, but the rout of men came rushing at us. At a little distance Dickon and the four pursuers paused. The other two came panting up and dropped on their knees beside the boat.

"Wilt take us, cap'n?" they begged together.

"Aye, but you'll stay in irons until we sail," said Ned Low, then looked up at the others. "In with you, lads. You there, stand back! Back!"

Suddenly the others began to obey, while Winter roared at them again. One of the men clambered into the boat—and then went sprawling atop of Ned. The other was up and at me before I realized his intent. Winter whirled and flung himself at Pilcher.

And the others came bursting at us.

XII



I CUT a sorry figure in this mishap, for my pistol went off in air, and I was on my face in the sand with two men plunging on me. Ned Low blew out the life of his assailant, but could not get rid of the body before another was on him. As for the bosun he went down like

an ox under the fist of Winter and stayed down.

And cook Philip dared not fire for fear of hitting us.

A cruel trap it was, well sprung and full of guile, and we were in truth snared in our own folly. I was bound hand and foot and left lying, but wrenched myself about so that I could see what was happening. All this took place, not as I give it here, but so swiftly that it were hard to realize at once.

Ned Low was struggling both with dead and living, trying to get his other pistol free, in the stern of the boat. She had careened as the load was taken out of her, and now Thomas Winter, an ugly grin showing his fangs, leaned forward and bore down on her with his weight. As she gave, Ned Low and his assailant were tumbled into the water.

"That takes the bite out of his pistol!" quoth Winter. "At him, lads—and alive, mind ye! Any man uses his knife, I'll spread-eagle!"

Why he was so anxious to take Ned alive was by no means clear, and it came very near to costing him all that he had gained. For Ned was on his feet, knife in hand and standing knee-deep in water; twice, with knife and fist, he broke clear of the men and was trying to swim for it to the ship, taking the chance of sharks. He could not get away, however.

At length one of the men got a grip on his knife-arm, and the others piled in. All went down in a turmoil of water and spray, and they haled Ned ashore with a man hanging to either arm, and so bound him.

Winter turned, shot out a long arm and seized Dickon by the shoulder.

"Boy, bide ye here and watch un, and if ye murder un I'll flay the hide off thy back!" he said, in so deadly a voice that the boy shrank back.

Then, loosing Dickon, Winter roared at the men:

"Pile in, lads; pile in! To the ship, afore they lay a gun on us!"

He shoved out the boat and leaped in, the five remaining men after him. There were only two oars in the boat, but with two men to an oar they sent her through the water. From the *King Sagamore* began to bang muskets; both Polly and the black cook were firing from the rail, but quite failed to stop the boat. Two of the

men were wounded, and no other damage was done.

A groan broke from Ned Low as the boat swept in under the ship's side and the men began to go up. Dickon, who had picked up one of Pilcher's fallen pistols, echoed the groan in a demoniac chuckle.

Not quite so easily done, however! The first man over the rail went back to feed the sharks, with a ball through him. Winter and the others piled aboard and beat the black cook down; we could hear Winter roaring at them not to kill him, for they would have need of every man to work ship.

Polly had fled to the quarterdeck with a pistol, and now Winter ran at her. She would have killed him then, with luck; but the priming flashed in the pan, Winter tore away the weapon and picked her up and took her below. A moment later he reappeared, having locked her in a cabin.

Upon that, having secured the ship, the men began to go over her like famished wolves. Gunner Basil was found and let loose. The ale-cask was broached and our turtle was made way with; one and all were so keen for food and drink that they forgot all else.

Dickon stood on the shore and bawled curses at them unheeded. So he turned to the pile of stuff we had brought ashore, broke out some biscuit, opened the rum and the water and began to get himself into a fine condition of drunkenness. Ned and I looked one at the other, but I could not reproach him.

"You were right, George," he said, and swore bitterly.

That was all, but it showed how keen was his self-blame for what had happened.

After a little Dickon came to his feet, staggering, for the rum had shot to an empty stomach and he was drunk. Plucking out his knife, he made his uncertain way to the form of Bosun Pilcher, who lay as Winter had stretched him out. Squatting down, he began with deliberate devilry to cut the gold earrings from the ears of the bosun.

Naturally enough this treatment revived Pilcher, who sat up cursing. Dickon hiccuped, fell way and retreated. I cried out to Pilcher to kill the young devil and free us, but as bosc came to his feet Dickon picked up his pistol and let fly. Pilcher reeled to the shot, and a staining smear of red leaped out across his face; turning around, not knowing what had happened,

Pilcher ran for it. Dickon with the second loaded pistol staggered after him and fired again, but missed.

The bosun disappeared over the crest of the sand-hills, whether dying or dead we knew not, and Dickon came back again muttering oaths. A roar of maudlin approbation came from the men watching at the ship's rail. He shook his fist at them and returned to his rum.

With all these things the afternoon was passing quicker than we knew; but to me and Ned Low, lying there on the open sand, the time dragged like an eternity. Dickon gave no heed to us, but sat maundering over the pistols, trying to recharge them with futile fingers until his potations and the hot sun sent him fast asleep. The pile of goods we had fetched ashore lay where Winter had flung them. Beyond the pile of canvas-sacked gold lay gray and hideous, at least to my eyes; since for this gold had Polly's liberty and our own lives been bartered. The men aboard ship were still drinking and feasting.

The sun was fast westering when Ned Low turned a white, strained face to me.

"I ha' almost got it, but not quite," he said in a low voice. "When I roll over, see can you put your fingers on the cord."

A chorus of drunken song lifted to us as he wrenched about in the sand and got his back to mine. Of Pilcher we had seen nothing. Either the bosun was dead or lying hurt and unconscious like a wounded animal.

Instinctive hope rises in all of us. Now as I fumbled with blind fingers for the cords at Ned's wrists I perceived Dickon asleep in the sunlight of the dying afternoon, saw the pistols at his feet, realized that we might yet have a desperate chance to win. And as the thought came to me I heard the rattle and clatter of men getting into a boat, and turned my eyes to the bay to see the longboat shoved off from the ship and sent toward us by half-drunken oarsmen, with Winter in the stern.

"Give way, ye dogs!" came his voice. "Lively does it!"

"No time to lose, lad," said Ned coolly. "I've been all afternoon working 'em loose."

"There y'are then."

I could not see him as I lay, but I heard him curse softly. His hands were too stiff and bloodless for his fingers to work on his

bound feet. Meantime the longboat was coming in to the shore, Winter standing in the stern and roaring at his rowers to lay back. Drunk as they were, they brought him in with a rush.

He leaped out of the boat and was at us—just as Ned Low rose up free. For a long moment the two men looked at each other; behind Winter, the four men tumbled ashore and stood gaping, too fuddled to know what was going on. But I, looking up at Winter, perceived that he seemed cold sober. Behind Ned, Dickon was stirring and staggering to his feet, awakened by the voices. Winter and Ned Low stood motionless, a grin upon the horse-face of Winter, who realized that Ned's feet would scarce bear him as yet.

"Why, here's Bloody Ned the pirate!" said he, and guffawed.

I had never before known, as I knew now upon looking up at him, the indescribable villainy of the man's face; perhaps he had never before let himself go free of restraint. Now, with the mask off, the furious and inhuman cruelty of him was all evident.

"I'll fight ee bare-handed, Bloody Ned!" he went on. "Dost remember the fight ye had wi' Francis Spriggs on his own quarter-deck, eh?"

Ned started.

"Zounds! How in the ——'s name d'ye know of that, Winter?"

"I heard tell on it."

Winter took a step forward, his huge hands clenching and opening again at his sides. His mirth vanished. He showed his yellowed fangs in a snarl, as does a dog to frighten an adversary.

"Fight, ye bruiser! I ha' looked a long while to get my fingers around that wind-pipe o' thine; gizzard and guts, but I'll tear it out afore I finish ee!"

A spasm of ferocity crossed his face. He lunged forward and dealt a powerful blow with his fist.

Ned avoided it, stumbled a little on his numbed feet, evaded the huge Winter and so came around in front of me. There he faced about and put up his hands, and for a moment I saw the old reckless gaiety in his face.

"Fall to, ye ——!" he called out—and then drove in a right-hander that rocked Winter's head on his big shoulders.

Now they fell to in all truth. Ned's recklessness vanished; before half a minute

was gone he knew that Winter was coming in to tear the throat out of him, literally. After the first few blows all Winter tried to do was to grab with those steel-hook fingers of his. Once he got a grip on Ned's shoulder, and nothing but a full-weight smash on the point of the chin loosened it. And as he came, Winter began to curse.

It was no ordinary cursing, but the foulest outpouring of rottenness that could be spawned in tavern or forecastle. That volley of filth drove Ned white with sheer fury, for there was a venomous madness in it that burned. As for me, I wondered what reason there could be back of it, for Winter's rage was no ordinary battle-anger.

"If you want it, take it, you dog!" panted Ned suddenly.

He opened his arms and let Winter come into a clinch. Both men gasped under the impact, then Winter set himself and made as if he would tear Ned Low asunder.

Instead Ned sent him headlong over the hip in west-country fashion, and when he rolled over and leaped upright, half of Winter's shirt was torn away. And over his heart there was tattooed a crimson, bleeding heart!

I saw it, and Ned saw it in the same instant.

Ned Low took a step backward, and his face was ashen. For a moment he stood powerless, absolutely paralyzed by the realization of whom he faced. Winter grinned and snarled, and then cursed him anew.

"Aye, it's Trunnel Toby!" he roared out furiously. "Trunnel Toby it be, ye spawn o' hell, who have chased me these five year! And now it be Trunnel Toby a-chasing of you——"

Ned seemed to shiver. Then a frightful cry broke from his lips, and he hurled himself forward, and the other came to meet him. No less was the hatred of the hunted than that of the hunter.

But now Ned Low was as a very flame of fire. Not a word came from his lips, and his face was a gray mask; his arms wrought upon Winter like the rods of an engine, and all the brute power of the other man was helpless before him. It was an awful thing upon which we stared in that moment—a man taking bitter and utter vengeance for such wrongs as few men have suffered.

For Ned Low was taking vengeance in red and running measure. He moved about

Winter like a dancing corposant, and left the fiery mark of his fists wherever he touched. Not once could Winter reach him. He drove in without mercy or pity, until Winter was backing helplessly before him, roaring in fury yet unable to fight back. Then Ned began to utter sharp, panting words.

"Take that—for the girl—ye murderer! And that—and that—for the old man—for the two ye killed—wi' one bullet—and that——"

"I'll tear out the throat of ye yet!" roared Winter, even under the blows. "I've saved ye up—till I could hang ye——"

He tried a kick. Ned parried it and drove out with his own booted foot. Winter gave a horrible grunt and doubled up, and Ned smote him full in the face, so that he jerked backward again and fell in the sand. He tried to rise, and could not.

"Up with ye, murderer!" cried Ned, kicking him. "Up, and take——"

Something flew over me, catching the last rays of the dying sunlight in its course; something that curved above me against the sky, like a blue flame. I heard Dickon's wild, shrill cry, and saw Ned Low stagger and throw out his arms. Then he set one hand to his side and pulled out the knife.

Ned plunged to his knees. Even then he tried to reach the figure of Winter, stabbed down at it with the crimsoned knife, but the blade only dabbled the sand. Ned fell to his hands, and then slowly rolled over and lay still.

Then there was a silence. Even Dickon stood aghast before his deed.

Upon that silence broke a storm of oaths and curses and orders from the ship. Gunner Basil stood on the rail, shaking his fist and trying to waken the staring men.

"Aboard with ye! Aboard wi' the gold—aboard!" he yelled frantically. "Aboard, ye drunken fools, afore night comes!"

They awoke, stirred, broke into movement. I could say no word, for the tears that were blinding my eyes, until Dickon came and took the knife from Ned's relaxed hand. Then I cursed him, and cursed him so bitterly that he could not answer me, but ran to the boat.

Me they hove into the stern, and the groaning figure of Winter above me. Then the gold was stowed aboard, and, leaving poor Ned where he lay, they ran out the boat and set her for the ship.

So the day died, and the swift twilight of the tropics merged into night almost by the time I was carried over the rail and flung into the scuppers; and the buckets of sea-water that they flung over the quivering bulk of Winter came running down past me in reddened streams.

XIII



LANTERNS were lighted above the deck, dimly lighting the planks and coiled ropes and sea-gear strewn about. Besides Winter, Gunner Basil and Dickon, there remained four men, two of them wounded; I, who lay bound in the scuppers, and cook Philip, who had been beaten into a mass of bruises and now went groaningly about his work in abject terror. Polly Langton had not appeared on deck, being still locked below.

Winter was a long time in being brought to life, for Ned had near killed him. I lay watching in bitterness of soul. So this man was Trunnel Toby! That explained much—his crafty dissimulation, his plotting, his venomous hatred of Ned Low, his anxiety to take Ned alive. Gunner Basil and he had shipped aboard us, with Dickon, with the twofold intent of pirating us and murdering Ned Low.

And they had won. Despite all, they had won. Pilcher was dead, and Russel, and Ned Low; they had the ship, the treasure—and at thought of Polly Langton down below I kept back a groan.

Gunner Basil brought dry clothes, which Winter donned, his face all puffed and bruised out of shape. Dickon brought him a great flagon of rum, which he gulped down neat. With this to hearten him Winter was soon on his feet and ordering things. Gunner Basil, who knew what arrangements I had made with the black islanders, told him that he might look for a crew in the morning; but Winter was more interested in learning just what had happened ashore. He sent for Dickon, who faced him jauntily at first, but soon changed in demeanor.

"So it was you knifed Bloody Ned!" said Winter heavily. "I have a mind to hang ee, lad."

He meant the words, too. Dickon shivered under his baleful stare.

"It was to save your life!" cried the boy. "He had ee down——"

An oath burst from Winter.

"Stow yer jaw! I'd ha' broke his cursed neck in another moment, ye swab! Get out o' my sight afore I gut ye! Ho, gunner! Is the boat made fast?"

"Fast, but not hauled up," responded Gunner Basil. "I had thought to go ashore later and turn some turtle——"

"Turtle be ——!" growled Winter. "Where be the gold? Fetch it here, lads, on the deck. Fetch it here, my bullies!"

Dickon slunk into the background, stumbled over me and kicked me savagely, uttering a flood of curses whose malevolence was directed rather at Winter, I thought, than at me.

The roughly sacked gold was brought up and chunked down on the deck. Winter called for a knife and then stooped down—painfully, since he was bruised and sore from head to foot. With the knife he slit the canvas of each sack, and let all the gold come out into a ruddy yellow stream over the planks.

"There y'are!" he roared. "Dickon, more rum! There y'are, lads—fill yer pockets! That's what brow lads gets on the Account—gold! Take it, bullies!"

Though I was across the deck from them, I could see all that took place there beneath the lanterns. Every one flung forward at the gold. Those four seamen, who a short fortnight previous had been exhorters to righteousness, and honest enough about it too, had now been turned completely to the rightabout. They matched the eager oaths of the gunner and Dickon in the scramble for the gold, until it dawned upon them that there was more gold here than they could well stuff into pockets, so that they all fell to laughing and jesting hideously.

The rum entered into it too, for a keg was brought up and broached, and all hands fell into a wild saturnalia. Each man decked himself to his fancy with plundered stuff from our after cabins; pistols and knives were brought forth and donned; in the midst came a flash and a roar as Dickon's pistol went off and came near to killing one of the men. The answer was a blow, and the two fell to fighting until Winter flung them apart with a bellowing laugh and made each of them down a mug of rum.

I soon saw where this would end. Presently Winter cocked one bunged eye at the main yard, and roared at the gunner.

"Ha, Gunner Basil! Be that block an' tackle rigged to hang me?"

"Aye," hiccuped the gunner, who was reeling. "Master Roberts rigged un."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Winter, and flung a knife across the deck that passed over me and slapped into the bulwark. "Shalt hang at sunrise, Roberts, ye dog! Shalt go to —— to join Bloody Ned, —— ye both! Dickon! Where are ye, Dickon? Go unlock the lass' door and bid her come hither, else I'll come down and fetch her!"

He added a jest to this that fetched a howl of maudlin laughter from the other men. Dickon slipped away aft.

Just here I heard a faint sound, and twisted about to see the black cook Philip come crawling along the rail toward me cautiously. He was in mortal fear, and his teeth were chattering from terror; none the less, he reached up and took from the wood that knife Winter had flung, and then set it to my bound wrists.

"They'll murder us all," he whispered. "Swim for it, master! I'll wait."

Then he went crawling away again into the darkness, and I realized that my hands were free, and the knife left beside them. That was the act of a brave soul!

So numbed was I that it was some time ere any feeling crept into my fingers, and I was as helpless as if still bound, though my arms could move freely enough. While I lay trying to get some sense of touch into my hands, in order to take the knife and free my ankles, Polly Langton came quietly into the circle of lantern-light, followed by Dickon.

The men gaped at her in shamed silence. Winter was seated on the keg, and met her look with a bold stare. Then he spoke.

"Dickon! Draw rum for the cap'n's lady!"

Dickon moved about the task. As for me, I found the knife with my fingers, and inch by inch moved it in front of me and toward my ankles, fearful lest some eye catch the motion. None did, however, and presently I was parting the hemp that bound me.

Not that this new freedom of mine gave any hope. I lay at the starboard rail of the ship; across from me, near where Winter and the men were grouped, the ropes ran down to the longboat. Gain that boat I could not. All I could do would be to go over the rail and swim for the shore.

Help Polly Langton I could not, unless I attack and kill the whole band of those rogues; and that was an impossibility, even had I firearms. At best she might leap the rail and chance sharks in a swim for the shore. Even then Winter would pursue. And if we got away in the darkness, what remained? A lingering death from thirst and hunger and misery of the hot sun.

I had not forgotten Ned Low, however. As I felt the cords give under the blade, it came to me that I might at least finish Winter, give the lass a fighting chance to reach the shore and perhaps work damage on the other rogues ere they killed me. And this I resolved to do, for I was mad to get a blow at that devil Winter.

My ankles free, I began to rub them cautiously.

Dickon came with the pewter flagon, but Polly took no heed. He shoved it at her, and, grinning, laid his hand on her arm. At that she snatched the flagon and struck it over his head, so that he staggered from the blow and cursed as the rum went over his face. Aye, and his hand went to the knife at his belt, whereat Winter came to life suddenly.

Rising, he swept forward an open-handed blow that knocked Dickon sprawling.

"None o' that, ye spawn of ——!" he roared. "Get up!"

Dickon rose with so black a look that I thought he would let fly at Winter. But the latter only broke into a laugh at the boy's aspect, in which the other men joined.

"Lay hand to the cap'n's lady again, and I'll hang ye!" he said, then turned to the lass with his bold regard. "Gi' me the cup, lass! I'll fill it again for ee. Shalt have silks and jewels, diamonds and pearls! Trunnel Toby's lass ye shall be——give it to me!"

She dropped the flagon on the deck.

"Murderers!" she cried out. "Oh, I saw it all from the cabin window! What have ye done with Master Roberts?"

"We be going to hang un at dawn," said Winter, and grinned. "Come, lass, come! What wilt offer for his life, eh?"

"She be soft i' that quarter," spoke up Gunner Basil with a hiccup. "Main soft, I tell ee, Toby! Look out she don't knife ye, Toby. Dost remember the Spanish jade that slipped a knife into Cap'n Franklin, hey? —— my eyes, but she split his weasand! Look out ye don't go the same way, Toby."

Winter laughed—broke into a hearty guffaw. He stooped for the pewter cup, bent it into shape again and held it to the spigot of the keg. When he had downed the rum he wiped his swollen lips and tossed away the flagon.

"Come, lass!" he said in a maudlin jocularity that might turn at any instant to a raging madness. "Come, lass! Wilt give a kiss to spare thy Roberts a day, eh? A kiss for a day—a day for a kiss, lass! Rot me, the rum ha' got my tongue.

"Bloody Ned be dead, and the bosun dead, and Trunnel Toby's loose. Here be a fine ship, and the *Rose Pink* yonder be waitin' for us, and Trunnel Toby be commodore. Aye! Ye shall be commodore's lady, sweet lass, wi' diamonds an' rubies from the Indies, and fine silk to wear! Come, lass—a day for a kiss!"

No one was watching me; all eyes were on the lass, standing there straight and slim and defiant before the brute who taunted her. I had no skill throwing the knife, or I might have sunk it into him then. I gathered myself together and waited, ready to shout to Polly and leap forward at them.

"I will ha' naught to do with you, ye murderers!" she spoke out bravely. "Aye, and if ye hang Master Roberts I'll never rest until I see each one of you brought to Tyburn Tree and laid there!"

At this, Winter guffawed again.

"Sink me, but I like a lass o' spirit! So ye'll bring me to Tyburn, eh? Well, many another ha' said that, lass. Ned Low said it five year gone, when I pistoled the doddering old rogue who called him son, and when I put my knife into his lass! Aye, and where's Bloody Ned now, tell me? Call him up from — to help ee, lass! Here, give us a kiss and we'll leave Roberts' hanging until sunset instead o' sunrise!"

He lunged forward, his hand outstretched to grip the lass.

She drew back a step, then, swift as light, threw her weight into a ringing blow. Her fist took Winter squarely in the mouth, where Ned Low had battered him sorely; and, no less from the pain than from the surprise, sent him staggering and stumbling sidewise until he tripped over a coiled rope and came to hands and knees.

A wild howl of laughter and mirthful oaths surged up from one and all. Winters recovered, swayed on his feet, then uttered a roar of anger. I gathered myself for the

leap, and a shout to Polly was upon my very lips—when it was checked.

For the girl took a step backward, staring at the rail. So great was the fright painted in her face, that the men turned to see what she was staring at; and so did Winter. And, over the rail, they saw the face of Ned Low rising.

Terror froze me, no less than them. Ned was dead in the sand, and Bosun Pilcher was dead; yet there rose the head and shoulders of Ned Low, and beside him those of Pilcher, whose earrings glittered yellow in the lantern-light. Ghostly and terrible were they, heads and faces streaming with water, and drew themselves over the rail to the deck. From the one side Winter gaped upon them, a frightful horror in his countenance; from the other, the group of men, sitting there paralyzed.

"Back from — to help the lass, Thomas Winter!" said Ned.

At sound of his voice I ceased to shiver, for that voice of his was alive and no ghost. I rose and stepped forward to join them, but no man heeded me.

A sudden howl, an awful thing to hear, shrilled up from the men. They fell backward, rolled on the deck, stumbled over each other, trying to get away. Pilcher, empty-handed like Ned, grinned and started toward them. But Ned Low stepped forward and faced Winter, who was trembling there as he stood.

"Bloody Ned!" he gasped. "Back to — with ee; I'm done with ee!"

"You're not done with me till I see ye hung!" shot out Ned, and started forward.

"Ghost or no," rang out a thin, drunken scream, "I'll kill ye over again!"

It was Dickon. He darted out of the shadows, mad with fear and rum, and his arm swung in an arc. I shouted at Ned; and, hearing the shout, Ned turned. The knife went past him, singing viciously—and thudded into another mark. The sound of it hitting was plain to all of us.

From Winter broke a furious, gasping shout. He put hand to belt, and a pistol broke the silence with its roar. Then he fired his second pistol. Through the smoke I saw Ned go plunging forward, bringing him down to the deck with naked hands. And through the smoke I saw the boy Dickon, rent and riddled by those bullets, fall across the rail and gasp out his life.

One of the seamen ran at me blindly and

struck with his knife, and I loosed at him. We had it hot and thick for a moment, the man stark mad with fear, until the steel went into him and he sank blubbering away. Out of the shadows reeled two figures—Gunner Basil and the bosun, locked breast to breast and fighting like mad. Aye, and there was the black cook, Philip, swinging an empty musket and yelling as he ran after the frightened men. Looking back to Ned, running to help him, I saw him swing an empty pistol and then come to his feet. I had him by the hand, and cried out at the good grip.

"Man, man, I thought you dead there ashore——"

"Zounds, there's not much life left in me!" he said, and laughed out with so gay a note that I wondered. "Had not Dickon's knife spoiled Winter's aim, I'd be gone. But he's taken care of—see that he's bound fast, George——"

He staggered and would have fallen, but that I caught him. There was a bandage about his body, beneath his shirt, and the blood was seeping out afresh from his wound. Polly Langton ran to us, crying and laughing all at once, and as Ned sank down on the deck I turned to her.

"Polly—take care of him, quickly!" I cried. "I must see to things——"

I left her kneeling over him and started forward, wild with eagerness to clinch this astounding turn that had flung the ship into our hands again. Bosun Pilcher rose up from the deck before me, a dripping knife in his hand, and I looked down to see Gunner Basil writhing out his life on the planks.

"Quick, bosc! Go tie up Winter unless he's hurt to death. I'll see to all for'ard——"

I ran on, and in the bows found the three remaining seamen, partly recovered from their mad panic, roiled in a furious encounter with Philip, who had pursued them there. When I came up and the men knew my voice, they flung down knives and yelled for mercy. I shoved a coil of light line into Philip's hands and told him to bind them.

"You shall have what punishment Cap'n Low metes out," I told them. "Stay bound until morning, ye dogs, and if you're not hanged, thank your fortune. Philip, make 'em fast! Then haul each to a gun-carriage and lash 'em there. When you're done, report aft. We must have the ship cleaned up before those islanders come aboard in the morning, else they'll take us for pirates and not ship."

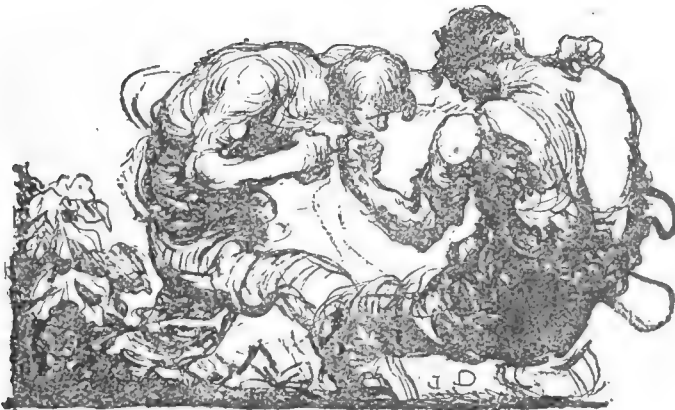
"Aye, sir," sang out Philip with a laugh.

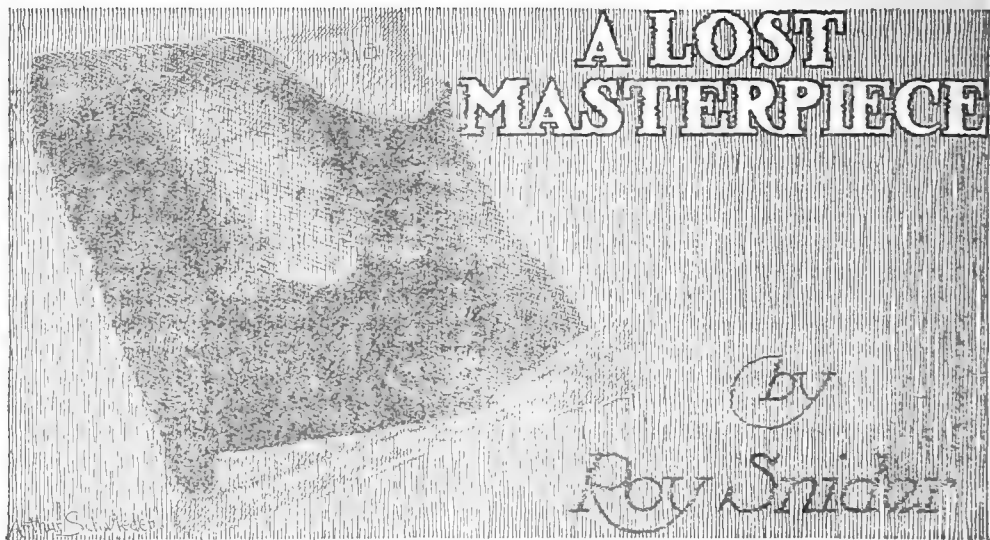
I went back aft and found Bosun Pilcher just mounting to the main yard with a line. He grinned cheerfully and paused long enough to tell how he had been scraped by a bullet over the head but not greatly hurt, and how that evening he had found Ned Low crawling over the sand; and the rest was not hard to guess, though I shrank at thought of their swimming out to the ship through those shark-infested waters.

And so to where Polly Langton knelt weeping beside Ned, who sat up and caught at my hand with the shadow of his old gay laugh.

"Polly!" I exclaimed. "Why the tears, dear lass? Here Ned is hurt, but not badly, and the ship and the gold are ours, and yonder goes bosc to reeve the line that hangs Trunnel Toby—why the tears?"

"That's why, George," she said, and laughed through her tears.





I DIDN'T," said the red-haired man, shortly. The full-throated voice proved his nationality more convincingly than did the service badge he wore.

"You're a liar, you dirty Canada crook!" hotly retorted his brunette *vis-à-vis*. "And——"

He who received the fighting epithet, struck savagely across the table at the one who had insulted him; his chair crashed backward behind him as he half-rose, and the force of his blow carried his body sprawling half-over the table. The dark one avoided the onslaught by a scant fraction of an inch, ducking sidewise and throwing himself from his chair, but at the same time gripping its back.

Before "Red" had recovered himself, Blackie swung his chair aloft. Red hurled himself sidewise and shoved the table toppling toward his opponent in almost one movement. The chair descended with shattering force on the table's ascending edge; and Red's move was successful to the extent that his impromptu weapon, hurtling crazily, disconcerted the chair-wielder sufficiently to cause him to leap nimbly backward to avoid entanglement.

Red leaped at him, and, realizing that his ponderous implement of offense was useless, the dark man dropped it and instantly set himself in a perfected attitude of scientific defense. Both men were evidently experts in the art of handling nature's weapons.

They fought with the trained skill and cunning of professionals—striking, parrying, guarding, with bewildering speed and superb effectiveness.

It happened in the Assembly Hall of the Lake Carriers' Association at Cleveland, Ohio, the authorized shipping office for Great Lakes seamen.

A dozen occupants of the place scrambled to their feet to witness the fight. The agent in charge ran forward to stop it.

"Cut it out!" he cried harshly, reaching for Red's shoulder.

Red evidently sensed the move before it was made. Parrying a cunning jab from his adversary, he stepped swiftly aside and, without turning his head, swung back-handed at the agent a crunching, raking smash on the mouth which sent the would-be peacemaker cringing backward.

Quick to seize the advantage, Blackie lunged in with a vicious jolt to the tawny one's ribs, and he, for the instant off guard, could only half-block it with his forearm. Then he staggered from the dizzying force of the impact.

Blackie leaped in again. Red dodged and clinched. There was a moment of tense straining. Red's arms gripped. Blackie's hands fumbled. Then his knee jerked savagely upward to Red's crotch, and he wrenched clear of the clinch, whirled suddenly and dashed to the door.

Horribly sick from the pain of the foul blow, Red swayed drunkenly, and was for

the moment helpless. The other rushed through the door and slammed it shut behind him. Red took a few weak steps forward, striving heroically to recover himself. He stood at the door breathing heavily; then, with a great effort passed out and into the street.

Blackie was running, fifty yards away. He started to cross the street, glanced back and saw Red, and without hesitation, leaped to the running-board of a passing motor car.

Red started in pursuit, his shocked stamina rapidly reasserting itself.

The driver of the car objected to the presence of his unexpected and unsolicited passenger and drew up to the curb and stopped. Blackie dropped to the sidewalk, and without a glance at his erstwhile chauffeur, ran on down the thoroughfare and turned the nearest corner.

When Red arrived, seconds later, the object of his chase was not in sight. He looked into a cigar store, glanced over the occupants of a restaurant, hesitated a moment, then hailed a cruising taxicab.

"Statler Hotel," he directed the driver as he entered the cab. "And make it snappy, will you?"

In the taxi, he rearranged his disheveled clothing, and when he reached the hotel his appearance was fairly presentable.

He dismissed the car, entered the hotel and went directly to the elevator, evidently knowing exactly where he wanted to go. Stopping at a room on one of the upper floors, he entered without knocking.

A man in a gray suit lolled comfortably in an easy chair, smoking a cigar. His entire appearance, at first sight, suggested indolence and disinterested idleness, but a look at his eyes belied this impression incontrovertibly. His dark-gray orbs advertised an adventurous soul and a spirit of reckless daring. In the lapel of his coat was fastened a bronze badge, twin of the one worn by Red—the Canadian Army decoration for "Service at the Front."

He scrutinized Red for a second or two; then jerked erect, keen, alert and ready witted.

"Spill it!" he said. "I see there's a hitch."

"Beat it to the check-room with me," answered Red, "I'll tell you as we go."

The gray-clad man sprang to his feet, seized and donned a hat, and the two left the room hurriedly. Reaching the street, they

entered one of the taxicabs at the hotel stand and told the driver to make speed to the Lake Shore Depot.

"Well!" said Red, when the cab started, "I carried that music-roll around, just as you told me—went into hotels, stopped at the Post Office, and went and got a room where you said. Nobody bothered me at all, so I left it in the room and went to the express office and got the package with the check in it, took it back to the room to open it, put the check in my pocket and went down to the Lake Carriers' Hall to wait for Burk. I was there about half an hour when a black-looking mug came in and walked up to the table where I was, as though he'd expected to find me there. He says, 'I've got another wheelsman for you, mate. He's ready to go aboard right away.' I said, 'You've mistaken the party, I guess. I'm not a mate.' 'The — you ain't,' he says; 'then what the — did you ship me for less than an hour ago?' He was plumb on the warpath and he got my goat. 'I didn't,' I says, kind of short. 'You're a liar!' he yells loud enough for every one to hear. Before I thought, I swung at him. We had it then. He was good—has everything I've got and maybe a little more. The agent interfered, and he got to my ribs when I was duckin' the agent. He landed hard and I clinched. He must have frisked me for the check then, for he gave me the knee, tore loose and beat it. I was too groggy to follow for a minute, and he was half-way down the block when I got to the street. I lost him at the next corner, and beat it to tell you.

"What do you make of it? If we get to the check-room ahead of him, maybe the guy there will remember you and we can head him off. It's the only chance, I guess."

"Mighty poor chance, at that," replied the other thoughtfully. "I guess they were on to the phoney music-roll all along. Maybe we played it too strong. Then they'd guess that the real one was in my club bag. I thought we'd ditched them in Detroit, but they must have been gapping us down all the time, and if they saw me check the club bag and then go to the express office to ship the parcel, it's likely they guessed that I'd sent the check in it. Otherwise we'd have been frisked on the boat coming down. They've certainly got brains, and they're wizards on the guess. That dark guy is probably some private dick that they've

hired right here in Cleveland. A lot of them are ex-convicts, and expert dips. That's my guess anyway."

"Two thousand bucks for that picture in the music-roll," mused Red. "It seems to me we're earning every nickel of it, Jim. Where do you suppose Burk sees any money in a little picture like that, without even a frame on it?"

"Burk's only the secretary for old John Haswell," answered Jim. "You know that. These old geezers get a sort of monomania for collecting things. That picture may be a lost masterpiece, or something, and old Haswell would pay ten times as much to get it if he wants it badly enough. As I said before, I think it's all bunk about its having been stolen from him. I'd just as soon believe that he got track of it some way and sent us to Duluth to steal it for him. That game of not reporting the theft to the police for fear of other collectors would get on to it listens like a fairy tale to me."

"Then why the — did they chase us all the way down the lakes trying to get it back themselves, instead of telling the bulls when they knew we had it?" exclaimed Red, wonderingly.

"Maybe that gang stole it from some one else," said Jim. "We don't know how deep we're in."

At the station of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway, Jim identified himself as "James R. King."

"I checked a club bag in Detroit," he explained to the clerk at the baggage counter. "Bought a ticket on the Lake Shore and then changed my mind and came over on the boat. I have the ticket, but I've lost the check, but I remember the number." He presented a railway ticket with a baggageman's punch mark, and gave the number of the lost check.

The clerk searched amongst the accumulated baggage for a club bag bearing a check of corresponding number, but without success. Then he ran through a bunch of redeemed checks.

"Here you are," he said. "Your club bag's been called for already. Some one else has got it. Too bad, but the only thing you can do is to notify the police."

The two adventurers withdrew to confer.

"We'll have to see Burk and tell him how we're fixed," announced King. "It looks like good night to the two thousand seeds!"

"It sure does," acquiesced Red, ruefully. "And we've spent some of our own, besides. Try and get Burk on the 'phone."

The man Burk was located at the Lake Carriers' office where he was awaiting Red's advent. He made another appointment with the friends at the Statler Hotel, and the three were presently closeted together.

Burk sat stroking his chin while the partners told him what had happened, and was evidently pondering and planning while he listened. He was a slenderly built, lean-faced man, and his appearance generally was not such as to inspire confidence. The suggestion of his features as he pinched his chin in his cupped hand was decidedly Mephistophelean. He considered for some seconds after he had heard all that King and Red had to say.

"I didn't tell you fellows the whole story, when I sent you up there," he finally vouchsafed. "There was another crowd started for Duluth about the same time that you did, and they were after the picture too. They're the ones that have followed you and they've finally got it away from you. They're hired by that William S. Dorey, the steel man. He's as much of a nut on art as Haswell. He's over at Long Point on a fishing-trip just now, and those thugs of his will take the picture over there to him."

"Do you know anything about a motor-boat?" he asked suddenly.

"I could make one if I had to," answered Red. "That's my game."

"Right!" said Burk. "Meet me at the Cleveland Dinghy Club in an hour, and we'll take a run across the lake."

He rose as he spoke, and the interview was ended.

"Jim," said Red when Burk had taken his departure, "I think that guy's crooked."

"So do I," answered King lazily. "I've thought so all along."

"I think he's lyin' about William S. Dorey," continued Red.

"Know he is," was the laconic answer. "Dorey's at Gross Point at a golf tournament, and he couldn't be pulled away from it with a tug-boat. He's about as much a nut on art as I am on prohibition. And I doubt like — if Burk has anything at all to do with old man Haswell."

"What d'ye think's the game then?"

"No idea, but I see where we stand to grab a bunch of coin if we live long enough, whether Burk turns out good or not."

"Spill it, you old clam. What's stewing in the old bean?"

"What is there in Canada that you can't get in the well-known U. S. A.?"

"Ask me an easy one. There's oceans of hooch over there if you know where to get it, but——" Red sighed resignedly.

"Well! we're going to Canada, and I'm the lad that knows where to get it. So what do you think of that?"

"Lead me to it!" cried Red enthusiastically. "Yo! Ho! Ho! And a bottle of scat! And a nice juicy motorboat to haul it in. I think I grasp the idea, and it sure looks good to me."

"I'm not at all sure that I grasp it very clearly, just yet, myself," demurred King, "but I believe we'll be able to work out a plan along the general lines that you have suggested. Us for the Dinghy Club."



PUNCTUAL to the minute, they arrived at the Dinghy Club wharf. A large motor-cruiser was moored at the float, and a couple of club attendants were assisting the driver of a delivery wagon to transfer supplies from the wagon to the boat. The supplies consisted chiefly of cases of food. And two large drums of gasoline lay on the float ready to be sent aboard.

Inquiry for Mr. Burk elicited the information that he was on board the yacht, and proof of the assertion was almost instantly furnished by the appearance of the subject of inquiry.

"Come aboard, boys, and help stow the grub," he called. "We'll be ready to go in ten minutes."

And indeed it was scarce ten minutes before the lines were cast off and the cruiser, with Red at her motors, moved away from the float.

Lake Erie is not the most beautiful of the five Great Lakes. Its shallow waters have a decidedly muddy tint, and its shores are not especially picturesque. Lakesmen consider it the most treacherous lake of the chain, and the most hazardous to navigate.

On this particular evening it was at its best. The sun was setting in a flood of orange and crimson coloring, and its declining reflection cast a great glowing path of fiery glory across the sparkling bosom of the lake. Smoke from the funnels of passing freighters ascended lazily and in fantastically distorted clouds, or hung in hazy

streamers above the water. Puffing fishing-tugs scuttled busily harborward, and a great, white schooner yacht winged her way daintily into the path of the retiring orb of day.

The motorboat, which bore the suggestive name of *Halcyon*, sped out into the gathering twilight. Burk laid her course to the northeast, and was evidently familiar with his undertaking.

King lounged about the deck doing nothing, and apparently not observant. Red busied himself with the high-powered motors.

King eventually insinuated himself into the tiny engineroom, and squatted lazily on a convenient tool-box. He did not speak for several minutes. Then:

"Grub enough for a month, Red," he informed his partner, "but no great supply of gas. Must figure on camping over there for a while."

Red merely grunted. He devoted all his attention to the engine.

Burk was inclined to taciturnity, and was very evidently a man of few words. As the sun finally disappeared from view, he turned from his steering and asked abruptly—

"Are you hungry?"

"Certainly am," answered Red heartily. "How about some grub?"

"Take the wheel, King, and I'll rustle some," said Burk. "I'm half-starved myself."

King moved to the wheel and receiving the course from Burk, settled himself for a trick of steering. The erstwhile steersman went to the compact little galley and commenced operations on an oil-stove. Presently a pleasing aroma of coffee and frying bacon gave testimony that culinary efforts were well under way.

Red and Burk ate together, then the latter relieved King at the wheel, and he took it upon himself to wash the dishes after he had finished his meal.

The flash of Long Point light, one of the most powerful on the lakes, constituted a splendid landmark before the night was two hours old. By midnight they were well-abreast of the point itself. They rounded it, well-out, ran up the outer bay, and entered the inner harbor well before daylight.

Burk seemed thoroughly at home in the tortuous channels and unexpected shallows of the weedy inner bay, and brought the *Halcyon* to moorings close to Long Point

bar, and opposite the little town of Port Rowan, without hesitation or near mishap.

"We're a move ahead of the game," he remarked, with as much enthusiasm as he ever exhibited. "Those crooks would go to Port Stanley on the car-ferry, then to London on the Radial Line. From there they'd have to go to Ingersoll, and get a jerkwater branch of the Grand Trunk to Port Rowan. It's a roundabout way, and they can't get here before tomorrow at half-past two. That gives us time to look around and get the lay of things. I know this bar like a book. I shoot ducks here every Fall, and I'll have no trouble at all locating Dorey's camp. Let's turn in now and get a little sleep."

As was his way, he suited the action to the word and stretched out on one of the suspended berths in the *Halcyon's* cabin. Nothing loath, King and Red followed his example, and the three were shortly sound asleep.

The sun was two hours high, and still the trio slept. A fishing launch ran past close enough to hail, but the drumming of her motor failed to disturb them. Another launch approached, evidently with no intention of running past, as she was headed directly for the *Halcyon*. A bewhiskered person in ill-fitting clothes directed her movements, and there was that in his demeanor to indicate that altruism in any form was an unknown quantity to him.

He stopped his engine when he was a hundred feet or so from the cruiser and, with diminished momentum, ranged silently alongside. As the smaller boat came into contact with the side of the larger, all three adventurers awoke, and almost simultaneously sprang to their feet. Burk had an automatic pistol out and ready for use before his eyes were entirely open. King crowded to the scuttle-way of the cabin, and Red, evidently unmoved, yawned and stretched himself elaborately.

"What's bitin' you guys?" he asked sleepily, rubbing his eyes. "Think it's pirates or something?" Which remark and general bearing were not altogether in accord with his sudden leap from his couch.

The occupant of the launch scrambled to the *Halcyon's* deck as King emerged from the scuttle.

"Do you own this boat?" demanded the whiskered one harshly, and without prelude. He evidently entertained a fairly exalted opinion of his own importance.

King was nettled.

"No!" he snapped. "Do you? How's chances for a pipeful of your whiskers?"

"Now look here, young feller," blustered the visitor truculently, "I don't want none of your slack. I'm the fish inspector for this district an' I want to see the owner of this here boat to see his permit. Now, where is he, an' none of yer danged humbuggin'?"

"I haven't the least idea where he is; and what he'd want a permit for is more than I can guess. Better explain yourself, Gabe. You look as though you had warts on your shoulder-blades, and you certainly must have been a whole lot of places since you left the barber-shop."

"Cut it out, King!" ordered Burk testily, coming on deck. "I'm the owner," he said, addressing the inspector. "What permit is it you want to see?"

This gentleman was in a fuming rage over King's flippancy.

"I'll show you what permit," he cried angrily. "I tell you I'm the fish inspector, and I want to see your fishin' permit, see? Fishin' permit!" he shouted. "Is that plain enough?"

"We're not here to fish, and have no permit," said Burk mildly. "But we're not in the least averse to giving certain obstreperous persons a sudden and much-needed bath, if they bother us. How'd it be if you'd hook up the slack of your trousers and get to — out of here while you're able to go and all together?"

Possibly Red's added presence on deck decided the irate inspector on his method of procedure. Anyway he went forthwith and without further words.

"Know that freak, Burk?" asked King.

"Never saw him nor heard of him before," replied the one addressed. "I'm fairly well-acquainted with the fish inspector here, and I know that isn't he. I'd take him for one of Attorney General Raney's whisky spies. They're thicker than fleas on a dog over here, and anybody that's sufficiently yellow-livered can get the job. Let's get breakfast, and go ashore," he said, suddenly changing the subject. "We've plenty to do today, and the sooner we get at it the better."

Long Point is a narrow sandspit jutting out into Lake Erie for a distance of over twenty-five miles from the mainland of the Canadian shore, and extending approximately in a southeasterly direction. Its

lower end, on which the light-house is situated, is heavily timbered, and the upper portion is marshy and indented with shallow bays and lagoons.

It is a favorite resort of sportsmen, and although it is a rather desolate and uninviting region, the excellent bass fishing-grounds and extensive and well-stocked wild-fowl marshes attract many vacationists.

Burk suggested taking Red ashore with him and leaving King to look after the yacht. King was entirely willing, for his part, but Red, for some unstated reason, was in favor of going alone, while Burk or King went to Port Rowan, three miles across the bay "to see what they'd find." King pointed out that Red was unfamiliar with the lay of the land of the bay. Finally it was decided that Burk should go to the bar alone while Red took the cruiser's dinghy across the bay to the little port, which seemed to satisfy the latter very well.

Red rowed Burk ashore in the dinghy and returned to the yacht.

"Don't come aboard, Red," cautioned King, as the dinghy came alongside. "Stay in the boat and get this quick.

"When you get to Port Rowan, hire a car at the garage and beat it to Simcoe. It's fourteen miles. If those guys are coming from Cleveland, they've got to come through Simcoe to get to Port Rowan. The train from Ingersoll gets into Simcoe at one o'clock. You'll know that club bag if you see it. Lay for it and *get it if you have to kill some one!* Get going! He's likely watching us."

Red got under way, and set himself to the task of rowing three miles. There was very little wind and the surface of the bay was comparatively smooth, but the sun was unpleasantly warm, and Red had a pronounced distaste for continued exertion.

The trip from Port Rowan to Simcoe in a motor car took little more than half an hour and Red had plenty of time to kill before the arrival of the train. He loafed around the lobby of the best hotel that he could locate, and read a magazine in lieu of any better pastime.

Failing to find either interest or amusement in the periodical, he strolled into the misnamed bar of the hotel and engaged the bartender in desultory conversation over a bottle of "two per cent."

"This is mighty thin stuff for a man that really wants a drink," he remarked disdain-

fully, eyeing the weak concoction. "I *would* like to taste something with a lift in it again before I die."

The bartender looked him over appraisingly.

"That's not as hard as you might think," he said meaningly. "Guys that's right don't go very dry around here."

"Lead me to it, brother," pleaded Red. "I'll plant a sunflower on your grave."

"See Jack Davis, over at the poolroom," advised the dispenser of liquids. "Tell him I sent you over."

Mr. Davis was easily located. In fact, he appeared to be a very popular person, who made a business of being easily found. Red stated his needs and his reference, and was straightway accommodated with a pint of very horrible whisky.

"Say, bo," he addressed the bootlegger confidentially, "how about getting a sloo of that stuff to run across to Cleveland?"

"I'd love to break into *that* game," replied the other fervently. "That's the real money. I can get this stuff by the barrel, but it's — to get into the ring that's running it over there."

"If you happened to find that you're talking to one that can put it across, you wouldn't mind tellin' him where he can see you private, some time, would you?" suggested Red.

"Any old time you say I can get a room up-stairs, and the devil himself won't disturb us," promised Davis. "I'm always around."

Red considered his time well-spent, and when he left the hotel to go to the station, he was in exuberant spirits. There was also an overdose of more than exuberant spirit in him, which may have accounted for his utter disregard of caution when the expected train arrived.

The first man to step off was one who carried a club bag which the watcher instantly identified.

A car, with its motor running, and with no occupant, stood beside the station platform. Red appraised it momentarily, while he felt in his pocket to release the safety catch of the automatic, to which, to do him justice, he usually scorned to resort.

The man with the club bag was not his darksome adversary of the previous day which Red considered a point in his favor. He strode up boldly, and when within proper striking distance, struck the unsuspecting stranger a terrific blow in the

stomach, and grasped the handle of the club bag. The man collapsed with a gasping moan, and Red, tearing the coveted bag from his relaxing fingers, whirled and leaped for the standing car.

A young man, probably the owner, was about to enter the driver's seat. A vicious jab delivered at a spot close under his ear sent him reeling, and Red scrambled in and started the car. A constable who had observed the outrage, sprang to the running-board as the car started. Red took the suicidal chance of turning in his seat to strike him so powerful a blow that he fell sprawling in the road.

The racing car lurched and swerved madly. Its reckless driver recovered his wheel and regained control in time to escape collision with a telephone pole by the grace of a crushed fender. Two other cars started in pursuit. Shouts sounded behind. A revolver barked, and bullets sang overhead. He took the first corner at dizzying speed, and fed more gas as he opened out into the main street of the town. A policeman who failed to scramble aside quickly enough, after bravely waving his arms in frantic signals to stop, was knocked over and rolled contemptuously in the dust.

At an intersection, glancing contact with a hastily stopped Ford ripped off the remaining fender, and a traffic semaphore which happened to be in the way was sent hurtling through a curved plate glass storefront. There were shouts, yells and many oaths. Pandemonium reigned behind. The stolen car sped madly on. Red had recovered the club bag and was making a glorious escape.

A mad sort of exhilaration seized him. He was through the town and out upon the open highway. Pursuit was falling swiftly behind. He had triumphed. His star was in the ascendant.

True, the wires would be busy and he might expect that attempts would be made to stop him in the several villages through which he would have to pass. They might attempt to ditch the car and let its driver take his chance in the wreck, but with supreme ego he discounted the risk.

The turnpike road or concession line over which he was speeding ran within a mile of Port Rowan and was intersected by a well-paved cross-road which constituted the port's main street when it entered the corporate limits of the place. Five miles west of

the intersection, the concession ended at another road by which he could reach the lake shore at a point above the great marsh at the landward end of Long Point. Another little-used road led along the shore of the point for its entire length. This much he had learned from the chauffeur who had driven him from Port Rowan to Simcoe.

There was traffic on the road which had to be reckoned with—automobiles and occasional farm wagons, and not infrequently pedestrians. Sometimes he took desperate chances and negotiated the passing at full speed. He was ruining the mechanism of the car and did not expect it to sustain the strain of the unusual effort he was requiring of it. Already the motor showed symptoms of rebellion against the harsh treatment it received, but he hoped to make it serve his malevolent purpose.

He flashed through a village which he judged to be Walsh, passed the outskirts of Forrestville, and in a scarcely credible few minutes was within sight of Port Rowan. Then came five miles of new tarvia paved roadway that was comparatively free of traffic.

The engine was complaining, unmistakably now, and was running dangerously hot. A strip of woods loomed ahead. This would be the end of the concession, he judged. He would have to slow down to make the turn into the other road.

He eased the speed of the car as he approached the turn, whirled into the new road, and immediately eased some more. It was not a road of the good variety. Rather, it was one of the worst and most crooked stretches of neglected sand-trail that he had ever seen or heard of. The abused car labored bumpily on, its mistreated engine fighting bravely to maintain its integrity, but making a distressful job of it.

There was a scant mile to go, and the motor barely lived through it. It limped into the Lake Shore road with a crippled and sickly effort, reached the brow of a short hill—and died. Its dying momentum carried it over the break of the rise and gravity helped it down. Red coasted to the foot of the hill, steered the car into a ditch, and climbed out and left it to whatever fate might be in store for it.

He took the disputed club bag and started out afoot. A grassy lane leading from the main road skirted the end of the big marsh

of the landward end of Long Point and reached the shore of the lake by a slight *détour*. Walking on the firm sand of the beach was not difficult, and though the sun was uncomfortably hot, Red proceeded at a brisk pace. There were recurrent banks of gravel and infrequent stretches of boulders, which made the going far from easy, but withal the way was good.

It was a neglected and desolate locality. The great marsh lay to his left and appeared to be of thousands of acres extent. It was dotted with willow-grown hummocks of islands, and sewn with a network of little lagoons and creeks. A narrow sand-ridge stretched between the marsh and the lake, accommodated a one-wire telephone line which marked the approximate course of a little-used road running the length of the point.

Red had noted what appeared to be a farmhouse a half-mile or so from the hollow in which he had abandoned the car, but aside from this mark of occupancy the region seemed to be entirely deserted.

An hour's walking along the beach produced abundant perspiration, some fatigue, and a galling irritation in his feet. As a change, and in the hope of finding better going, he left the beach and sought the road marked by the telephone line. Walking in the loose, dry sand of the ridge proved much more difficult than traveling on the damp, firm beach, and he returned to his former thoroughfare and plodded on. The last poisonous dregs of the bootleg whisky were having their effect. Red was decidedly sick as well as hot and tired.

Mile after weary mile he trudged. He would identify the vicinity of the *Halcyon*'s position by the landmark of an abandoned light-house on the lakeward side of the point; but the distance thereto seemed interminable.



IT WAS past mid-afternoon when he finally rounded an outjutting tree-clad promontory and sighted the longed-for structure at least two miles farther on. Those two miles were torturously long and trying. At their termination, the traveler threw himself down in the shade of a scrubby willow and lay panting. He vowed with sincere resolve that he would never again sample the wares of a Canadian hooch-peddler.

He buried the club-bag in the sand at the

roots of the willow, carefully noting the location and establishing marks of range and identification; then struck inland to walk across the bar to the bay side. The distance was over a mile. The land consisted of a series of sandy ridges alternating with stretches of marsh, each of which necessitated a *détour*. Irritating brush and clinging burs impeded his progress, and despite all precaution he failed to avoid getting his feet in the unexpected boggy spots.

The sun was setting when he finally came to the marsh-grown edge of the bay and discovered the *Halcyon* a short distance farther to his right. He skirted the edge of the reeds and marsh, being compelled to journey a considerable distance out of his way to reach a sand-pit on which he had landed Burk earlier in the day.

He was dripping wet up to his thighs now, and thoroughly tired. He hailed the *Halcyon*, but received no answer, nor was there any sign of life aboard. He remembered that even if King or Burk or both were aboard, the dinghy was miles away, and there was no possible means of their assisting him.

Perforce, he took off his clothes and prepared to wade or swim to the cruiser. He sank to his hips in seemingly bottomless ooze when he had taken twenty wading steps. Plunging forward to escape the menace of the soft, yielding mud, he submerged the bundle of his clothing which he carried, and realized that all his personal effects had suffered irremediable injury. Floundering wildly, he almost fell over a small "skag" or duck-boat concealed in a growth of quill-reeds. It was the sort of craft that an up-to-the-minute duck hunter uses in his "blinds" or hiding-places—had a bare four inches of freeboard, and was protected by a steeply crowned canvas "deck."

Its owner had accommodately left a short pole for propelling purposes in the bottom of the skag, and had anchored his unique craft with an easily raised chunk of limestone. Red lifted the stone and placed it on board the skag along with his water-soaked bundle of clothing; then proceeded to climb aboard, himself. The skag instantly capsized and spilled him unceremoniously into the ooze. Emerging muddy and wrathful, he righted the skag, recovered his saturated bundle and moved the treacherous little craft to the firmer ground at the

edge of the marsh where he turned it over to clear it of water.

Free of water and again carrying its impromptu cargo of bundle and anchor, the skag floated once more. This time Red crawled gingerly in over one end—as both were exactly alike, neither could be properly designated as “bow” or “stern.”

With the weight of Red's body for ballast the tiny boat floated with its unusual deck scarce an inch above the water; also it proved to be wonderfully stable on its keel, and practically impossible to upset. The steeply crowned deck shed water like a duck's back, and altogether, Red decided that it was a very excellent sort of boat for one who understood its vagaries.

He punted out to the *Halcyon*, and hailed again as he came alongside. No one answered. He passed the skag's anchor to the yacht's deck, tossed his bundle aboard, seized the rail and scrambled on board himself. The skag, relieved of its burden, bobbed up like a cork and rocked crazily. Red decided, in passing, that he had not yet learned all its vagaries.

The *Halcyon* was deserted. Red rummaged for a change of clothing and found the supply was decidedly limited; shirts, trousers and shoes were all that were obtainable.

He wrung out his sopping garments and laid them on deck to dry; then got the oil stove going and commenced to prepare a meal.

It was quite dark when he sat down to eat. The wind had risen and a miniature sea rocked the *Halcyon* gently. The skag bumped her side occasionally, and Red decided to attend to her mooring as soon as he finished his repast.

“Hands up, you!” rasped a harsh voice, suddenly. “Put 'em up or I'll blow yer head off!”

Red whirled in his chair and promptly complied with the order. The whiskered “fish inspector” stood in the scuttleway and menaced him with a double-barreled shotgun aimed uncompromisingly at his head.

“I got you this time, all right,” exulted the hairy one. “Thought I'd get you here. Soon's I heerd about the fracas at Simcoe I knowed it was you from that red mop o' yourn. Pretty slick, ain't you? But you ain't half as slick as old Tom Spurling. I'll show you a trick with a hole in it before I'm through with you.

“Stole a grip an' assaulted a constable an' stole an auto an' raised — in general, didn't you; but you wasn't slick enough to fool old Tom Spurling, was you?”

“Thought you was kiddin' me this mornin' eh? I ain't so easy kidded as I look. I'm deppity fish inspector under Mark Cox, an' beside that I'm in the Internal Revenue Department. Special officer, I am,” he gloated with exaggerated ego. “An' on top o' that I'm an authorized *private detective*. I don't need no papers to take you, but I got 'em just the samey.

“Come on, now,” he snarled. “Keep yer hands up an' come out on deck, an' none of yer tricks or I'll blow you in two!”

Red ascended the steps of the companionway with his hands held aloft. His captor backed away keeping the muzzle of the gun within a few inches of his body. Red stepped to the deck and pressed forward until the threatening muzzle touched his breast.

“There's my boat 'longside. Get in an' no tricks, if you want to live long,” directed the inspector-detective-special officer roughly. “You didn't hear me comin' this time, eh?” he added sneeringly. “You don't know how slick I am yet. I sneaked up on you so a cat couldn't 've heerd me. Get in there now, and see that you behave!”

The launch in which the officer had visited the *Halcyon* that morning was moored beside the cruiser. So silently had the man of the various branches of the law effected his approach that Red had failed to note his arrival. If he had heard the smaller launch strike the *Halcyon's* side he had surely mistaken it for the bumping of the skag.

He leaned slightly toward his captor as he turned to the left. For the moment the deadly muzzle was pointed across his breast. Instantly he lunged bodily sidewise and toward old Tom Spurling.

The gun fired with a thunderous report. Its charge seared Red's shoulder, scorching the fabric of his shirt-sleeve, and ripped a ragged, smoking gash in the fabric of the canvas covering of the cabin-top. Old Tom certainly meant business. He stepped quickly back and discharged the second barrel of his gun at the instant that his erstwhile captive struck it upward. The charge flew harmlessly into the air and Tom endeavored to club the weapon as Red sprang savagely at him. Not quite quickly enough, however; the adventurer's ready

fist drove crushingly into Tom's stomach and it was a weak and ineffective stroke of the gun barrel that descended on Red's head.

Tom grunted sickeningly and crumpled. Red lunged viciously and forced the relaxing body back. Tom clinched frantically, and the two plunged overboard locked in each other's arms. The water was not deep—there was scarcely enough of it to float the *Halcyon*. It came no higher than Red's neck when he finally gained his feet. Tom had gulped a huge quantity of bay water and was gasping helpless in his former victim's arms.

Red floundered to the moored launch's side, savagely cast off Tom's restraining arms and crawled on board; then grasping his groggy captor's clothing, he pulled him in and dropped him roughly on the bottom boards.

"Slick, are you?" he grunted, pantingly. "I guess I'll slick you a little more."

A bandanna handkerchief which Tom wore in lieu of a scarf around his neck served to tie his hands. His suspenders were pressed into service to secure his ankles. Red swung the launch around until she pointed toward the bay, and started the motor.

When it was running to his satisfaction he released the launch's painter, threw in the clutch on the propeller shaft and scrambled aboard the *Halcyon*. The launch, with its helpless and less than half-conscious passenger, darted away into the night, and open water.

Red gazed after it as it disappeared. "If you have good luck you'll go clear across the bay and run ashore somewhere," he muttered. "Slick, are you? I hope you drown."

There was no change of clothing this time, so he made shift to squeeze the water from what he had and made them suffice. His automatic was intact and he had several extra clips of ammunition.

A slight, rhythmical disturbance in the water close to the *Halcyon* attracted his attention.

"Some one swimming," he decided. "Who are you?" he demanded sharply. "What do you want?"

"All right, Red," called a familiar voice. "Give me a hand to get aboard."

Red dropped to his knees and leaned over the rail as King swam under the yacht's counter. It required no great effort to get the swimmer on board.

"You could have waded out. The water's only five feet deep," announced Red when King had gained the deck. "Are your clothes wet? Mine are, and there isn't a dry stitch to be had. I've been ducked twice."

"Mine'll do I guess," said King, displaying a tightly wrapped bundle. "Had them tied on my head and they're not more than half-wet. Got anything ready to eat? I'm starved."

"What was the bombardment?" he continued. "I heard it just as I got to the shore and was going to hail, but thought I'd better swim out and see if I couldn't be of some use."

"Come below and I'll tell you all about it," said Red. "Get your clothes on."

AS KING dressed himself in the yacht's cabin, Red recounted the occurrences of the day as they applied to himself, the while he got ready such food as was easily available. His dressing completed, King commenced to eat. When he had heard the entire recital of his partner's adventures he was silent for a while, evidently considering the situation. At last he said:

"We'll have to get out of here. They'll be after us like a swarm of hornets before morning. You take the boat and beat it alone, run across the lake to Erie or Dunkirk and hang around until night after tomorrow night. You'll have to get some more gas when you're over there. I'll get some grub together and stay ashore here. I'll get that club bag and carry it up the beach to where you came down the lane to the shore, and plant it there. I can find the place all right. You bring the *Halcyon* back there, two nights from now, and look for a lantern signal. Give me five flashes with the searchlight so I can pick you up, and if I'm there I'll swing a red light to show you where I am. I'll see that fellow Davis in Simcoe and have a batch of hooch there to put aboard. That's a good place to get it to in a car, and it's a new game, so no one'll be on."

"I haven't seen Burk since he left this morning, but he'll have to look after himself. I went ashore to look for him this afternoon, and I've been all over the — marsh since then and found no signs of him. Also I've asked a dozen cottagers here and there and there isn't one of them that's ever heard of Dorey's being here; but John Haswell is, and he has a bunch of friends with

him. There's a whole colony of cottages about two miles from here on the lake shore, and Haswell's place is among them. Now how does that listen to you?"

"It listens like another of Burk's lies," Red answered decidedly. "King, I don't make that guy," he continued. "I believe he's real bad medicine! How did he know that there was anything doing here and how could he be so well-posted all the time? It would take a bunch like the Pinkertons to know all the points that he has. Just think, Jim, he's as well-informed as the head of an intelligence bureau with a hundred operatives and spotters under him."

"He's so crooked he couldn't sleep in a round-house," averred King, "but that makes no never mind with us. It looks to me as though we hold all the trumps and if Burk wants that picture badly enough he'll come to us for it. In the mean time it's dead safe where it is and there's no danger of anybody else pinching it from us. And, on top of all that we've a good chance to do a stroke of business altogether contrary to the Volstead Act and as profitable as anything I know of."

"You'll have to go slow and careful down this inner bay. It's shoal, and tricky. After you pass Ryerson's Island and get into the lower bay you're Jake with the levers up, and you can go as fast as you like. You'll pick up the loom of Erie lights before you clear the point and you can't help finding your way."

While he was speaking he commenced assembling a package of food. Red hesitated uncertainly for a matter of moments, then said dubiously:

"King, that's — rotten hooch that Davis peddles. Seems kind of yellow to turn it loose on the poor scallops at Cleveland. Don't you think so?"

"It does seem kind of rough on the poor prunes who have to lap it up, but we're not compelling them to take it. We need the money, Red! We don't have to pull another stunt like this, but it pretty near has to go this time."

"Ahoy! the *Halcyon*!" hailed a cheery voice close to the yacht. "Anybody aboard?"

Red hastily switched out the cabin lights. "Searchlight, King," he directed in a whisper. "There's plenty of juice in the batteries."

While he spoke, King moved toward the

little pilot-house which contained the controls of the searchlight. A white beam flashed out and swept the surrounding waters and shore with speedy arcs, resting finally at its lowest angle of depression, on the figure of a man who sat idly in a canoe some forty feet distant. His general appearance was friendly and his attitude nonchalant. He waved his paddle in greeting; then dipped it strongly and sent his light craft toward the cruiser. A moment later they heard him scramble over the rail. Without hesitation he descended the companionway. Red switched on the lights again.

The visitor was a man of thirty years or thereabouts—a well-built, powerful-looking chap whose manner was frank and engaging.

"Good evening," he said, seating himself without waiting to be asked. "I wasn't sure whether there was any one here or not. Glad to see you're both aboard. I want to talk some."

"You're Frank Clark, aren't you?" he addressed Red, "and this is Jimmie King, I think," casting a glance of careless inquiry at the person he named. "My name is John Haswell. I presume you have heard of me."

John Haswell! They had pictured him a half-senile capitalist with a foolish hobby, an eccentric, a monomaniac—anything but this robust, athletic young man whose personality at once attracted and impressed them in his favor.

Without apparently noticing their surprise at his disclosure, Haswell continued: "My father was head of the Haswell Chemical plant at Akron, until recently, but he decided that he'd had enough and turned it over to me. He's a collector of works of art, and a patron of artists and writers. Burk used to be a ledger clerk in the Akron office until dad discovered that he had formerly been employed in an art gallery and had an extensive technical knowledge of pictures. After that he made him a sort of private secretary, for he was decidedly useful. He eventually showed crooked and dad ditched him. I gathered him in this morning when he was snooping around my Summer house over here on the bar."

He made the announcement in an ordinary tone of voice as though "gathering in" people was an everyday occurrence with him.

"You fellows were in the Canadian Army, weren't you?" he asked suddenly, and when both nodded affirmation, he

smiled. "I had four years in the Second Division, myself," he explained, "and I guess I understand how it was after you came home."

There was kindly and sympathetic understanding in his tones, and the partners instinctively liked and were willing to trust him.

"What did you do before you signed up, Red?" he asked.

The query would have seemed decidedly impertinent if propounded by almost any one else, but Red answered Haswell readily and without rancor—

"I was a motor mechanic."

"Pretty handy with the mitts too, aren't you?" smiled Haswell. "I'd say you'd had more than amateur experience from the way you hit."

Red grinned.

"I liked it as a kid," he explained. "Thought I'd be a pro. and, of course, a champ. Met two or three good men and then got disgusted with the way the business end was handled and quit it. Took up the motor game then and liked it fairly well."

"And you, King?" asked Haswell.

"I used to keep a set of books and did a little accounting on the side. Can't say that I liked it any too well, but I got along at it. Always had a restless sort of feeling that I wanted to be tearing the bone out of something. I don't know just how to explain it."

Haswell nodded understandingly; then continued more gravely:

"You two have done things since you got your tickets that you wouldn't have thought of doing before—things that you couldn't have been paid to do. I know how it was, for I had a siege of it myself. You didn't feel any too keen to go to work when you got out of khaki, and added to that you didn't find the sort of jobs that suited you. The gratuity money didn't last long, for prices were criminally high, and you didn't feel like applying to organized charity when times got bad and things tightened up. Lots of other good men went crooked the same way. And you can't deny that you have slipped. I'm not calling you common crooks, but I'll say this—you'd have refused to throw in with a man who did the same things that you do, if you'd known him five years ago."

The partners did not take offense. It was plainly evident that none was intended.

"To my own knowledge," continued Haswell, "you went to Duluth and deliberately burglarized a hotel room to get that picture because Burk offered you two thousand dollars for it. I'll say right now that it isn't a masterpiece by any means. It wouldn't bring over twenty-five dollars from any dealer. Burk didn't tell you the entire truth about it."

"It was stolen from my house in Cleveland by one of W. S. Dorey's men with Burk's connivance. Burk, as I said before, is crooked, and he expected to give the Dorey crowd the double-cross by taking their pay for helping to get the picture and then stealing it back from them and selling it again to the highest bidder, whom he naturally thought would be me. They took it out of the frame and carried it in that music-roll for convenience, by the way. Burk is an inveterate double-crosser."

"He invented the scheme of having you check the club bag at Detroit so Dorey's men could steal the check from Red, here. He told them he had discovered the ruse himself which made him solid with them and not only convinced them that he was working with them but that he was a very shrewd pal to have. Also it eliminated the necessity of paying you two the two thousand he'd promised you. As I say, he's strong on the double-cross."

"The dirty skunk!" cried Red wrathfully. "Do you see his game, King? While pretending that he had all this information on the side, he was cooking up the whole thing himself. Say! Whose boat is this, Haswell?"

"Burk has had it rented from a Cleveland man for the last few days. Why?"

"I don't quite get the drift yet," rejoined Red. "Go ahead and explain some more."

"Well," said Haswell. "Dorey is our principal business rival and dad had a chemical formula that was worth almost anything to Dorey because it gave us a monopoly on a product that is in very common use and which we alone manufacture because we're the only people in the business who have the formula for making it cheaply enough."

"Several attempts were made to steal it, and after our vault was blown open one night and the thieves would have got what they were after but for the timely intervention of a couple of private detectives who caught them in the act, dad hit on a scheme for hiding it which he supposed no one would

ever discover, though Burk did by some means.

"That picture is on a very thin canvas. Dad pasted the formula on the back of it and pasted another very thin piece of canvas over it. The finished fabric has the appearance of a rather thick piece, but gives no indication of what is concealed in it. You see now why Dorey's crowd were so anxious to get it, and it's quite plain why Burk was interested.

"You threw a monkey wrench into his wheels this morning, Red, when you pinched that club bag again. That fellow who had it was a pal of his and he expected to meet Burk here and help him hold me up for a steep chunk of blackmail as the price of the returned picture. You get the scheme now, don't you?"

King and Red nodded dully. It was only too evident that Burk had used them as tools in his operations.

"Red," said Haswell seriously, "I don't make a practise of preaching. I never yet saw it accomplish anything. You ruined a car this morning that belongs to a young fellow who had just about as rough a time in France as you had. I know for a fact that he put his last nickel into that car, expecting to make a little money this Summer carrying sportsmen to and from the bar. You did at least five hundred dollars dam-

age and he'll have to put a mortgage on the car to have it repaired. You didn't know that, of course, but you never took time to think about it. Do you see what you've made of yourself? Think it over."

There was a note of sternness in his tones, but Red did not resent it. He was thinking deeply.

"Burk offered you fellows two thousand dollars for that picture," proceeded Haswell, abruptly changing the tenor of his discourse. "I'll give it to you right now if you'll show me where you've planted it."

King and Red exchanged a momentary glance. It was a glance of complete understanding, despite its brevity. Red got to his feet.

"Haswell," he said simply, "we'll give you back that club bag, and we'd rather not take a cent for it. If you'll lend me five hundred dollars I'll send it to that gink that owns the car, and pay it back to you when I can. King is in on this too," looking toward his partner. "Will you call it square at that?"

Haswell slowly arose from his seat.

"Red," he said, extending his hand, "I'd like to shake hands with you two. I wouldn't offer you anything in the way of charity, but I really need a good mechanic and a good accountant in my business. Will you take the jobs?"



CORRIGAN

A
Complete
Novelette

By

Thomson Burtis

Author of "Groody Moves On," "The Education of Snapper McNeill," etc.

THE railroad track undulated around the low Kentucky mountains, its tortuous course following the narrow, tiny valleys. The train twisted and turned on itself, and the engine was almost constantly in view of the occupants of the rear coaches. Battered, weatherbeaten shacks set lonesomely on wooded slopes were the only signs of civilization.

The two men who were the sole occupants of the smoking-compartment of the rear Pullman surveyed the sunlit panorama in silent boredom. Not once had either of them lived up to smoking-compartment etiquette, which decrees that conversation shall result when more than one traveler is present.

The tall, broad-shouldered, slouching young man who rested easily on the side seat, facing the windows, was smoking a short brier pipe. He appeared to be about thirty, and his rough-hewn face was persistently attractive. A broad, high forehead, sleepy-looking dark eyes, jutting nose and protuberant jaw did not form a combination of features which would delight the admirer of classic perfection, but the effect of them below the stiff, black hair was that of virile comeliness. The wide, drooping mouth was whimsical, and around the eyes the laugh-crinkles showed plainly.

The other man was shorter and stockier but as dark as his silent companion. He

seemed to be about the same age. His clothes were not the impeccable habiliments of the other, and his full, tanned face and oversized hands and feet all helped to convey the impression of an out-of-doors man.

He was smoking a cigaret, the while he gazed sleepily out the window. Suddenly he broke into a deep chuckle and leaned forward.

"That shoat sure come a cropper that time," he remarked aloud, his face lighting up warmly.

The other man smiled. He too had seen the shoat which had tripped and fallen ludicrously in its mad effort to race away from the train.

"Hogs're the funniest animal there is, I reckon," went on the speaker.

His words betrayed his back-country origin, but they were spoken in a soft, deep voice and held just a hint of a drawl.

"Except people," qualified his companion.

The other glanced at him quickly, and grinned as he met the sardonic smile on the bigger man's face.

"Mebbe you're right," he agreed. "Getting off at Lexville?"

"Uh-huh. Is it a pretty good town?"

"Pretty fair. Never been there before, eh?"

"My first trip. I'll be there some time though, I guess. Are you pretty well acquainted around the village?"

The round-faced Kentuckian shoved his dusty felt hat farther back on his head and grinned widely.

"Toler'ble well," he said.

"I've got a letter of introduction to a young fellow there named Emmet Brady. He's supposed to be quite a boy around the town, I believe. Do you happen——"

"Where does he live?" interrupted the other with quick interest mirrored on his face.

"Let's see."

The stranger took a sheaf of letters out of his pocket and ran over them quickly. His fingers were long and slimly strong.

"4800 South Third Street," he announced.

"Boy, do I know him! And did I know his daddy, and do I know his mother! Why, I carried Emmet around when he wasn't nothin' but a kid with the strength of a hop-toad and the guts of ten ordinary men. But you won't find him at 4800 Third no more. He's out at Camp Henry now—enlisted in the Army."

"You don't say. I understood the family had quite a lot of money. The fellow that gave me the letter said his father was sort of a state political leader."

"They have, and he was. But Emmet got to smearing the town so much that he was goin' to ——, so a bunch of us told him he'd better straighten up. The next thing we knew he was in the Army. Said he knew he'd have to toe the line there. He's a private in the Air Service."

"Well, that's a queer coincidence too. That's where I'm bound. When working I am supposed to be a first lieutenant—flyer. And so my prospective chaperon around Lexville is one of the troops, is he?"

The Kentuckian nodded, meanwhile scrutinizing his companion with eyes that were suddenly shrewd and penetrating. The dark face was forceful and strong, he noted, and gave a curiously mixed impression.

"The longer you size him up the younger he looks," was his mental comment.

He took in the obviously expensive civilian clothes and noticed the breadth of shoulder and length of limb which the slouching posture camouflaged.

"My name is Shannon—Will Shannon," he introduced himself.

"Glad to know you. Mine's Corrigan."

After the brief handclasp Shannon settled down to tell Corrigan about Lexville. He

had been one of the political aides of the late Mr. Brady, and under Corrigan's half-amused questioning he spun a weird yarn. The flyer noticed that although his companion never lost the dialect of the mountains he nevertheless dropped casual references to cities from San Francisco to New York; that although his clothes were rather ill-fitting and obviously ready made, his sophistication was profound. Some, in fact most, of his stories concerned matters of more or less illegality, and yet they were told with an apparent zest which was like the delight of a small boy in concocting mischief.

Twilight was stealing along into night when the outlying yards of the city began to click beneath their train.

"I'm layin' low for some time now, though," Shannon was saying. "You see, the old chief is dead, and the other party's in power, and I don't stand good no way. And just lately I got into a little scrape along with Jack Davit, and the one we rooked most is a pretty big feller himself. He's wise to us, and he might make trouble. So I'm going down on a farm a few miles out of Lexville and lead the simple life for a while. Old feller owns it that's a friend of mine—lives there all by himself. Good hunting and fishing—it's right on the Ohio."

He stopped, and again his eyes plumbed the tranquil gray ones of his listener. Corrigan blew a smoke screen—he apparently gave the brier but little rest—and asked—

"Do you do much hunting and fishing?"

But Shannon, with a curiously elfin touch in eyes and face, continued to gaze at the flyer.

"Say, you ain't been doin' much talkin', have you? I remember one thing you said, though, that kinda made me wonder. Remember about your sayin' that people was the only animals funnier than hogs?"

Corrigan nodded.

"Just what did you mean?"

"Nothing much, perhaps. I just figure that perhaps ninety per cent. of human beings are dumb-bells; that is, haven't got much idea what they're doing or where they're going, or why. And the way everybody scrambles around after some unimportant thing they think they want—the whole structure of modern life—just strikes me as funny."

Shannon considered this carefully, and then grinned.

"I get you."

Silence fell for a moment. The Kentuckian was busy with his thoughts, sending sidelong glances toward Corrigan at intervals. It was evident that the Army man interested the genial scoundrel.

"Well, we're about in. Where was you going—right out to camp?"

"No, I've got a day or two. Say, why not have dinner with me if you haven't got anything better to do? I'd like to hear some more about this town and the adventures of you and this Jack Davit. Maybe you can show me a few places."

Shannon hesitated. He did not often reveal himself to strangers, and yet there had been a subconscious decision formed within him that this Corrigan was a "regular feller." As a matter of fact, he liked him. And in the little that Corrigan had said there had been an unconventionality and sometimes brutal frankness which were almost startling.

So, just as the porter appeared at the door with a whiskbroom in his hand he said:

"Suits me to a T. Go ahead and get brushed. Brushing wouldn't do these clothes no good."



ONCE off the train, Corrigan decided to check his grips at the depot for a while as he had not yet decided whether to take a late train out to camp or stay overnight in town. He and Shannon started to walk up-town.

"This was once the 'line' here—still's a little mite uncivilized," remarked Shannon as they strode briskly along.

The street was wide and shadowed and quiet, lined with shabby buildings that seemed somehow sinister. Despite the fact that it was seven o'clock, there were comparatively few people abroad. There was a considerable proportion of bold-faced girls who were drifting toward the center of town.

As they approached a corner two thuds mingled with heavy breathing and a rasping, "You will, will yuh!" came to their ears simultaneously. Both of them leaped forward.

A few feet down a dark alley a big policeman was holding a cowering, stunted figure with one hand while with the other he wielded a club. In the second that elapsed while the two new acquaintances took in the scene the victim of the clubbing dropped his upflung arm weakly.

The policeman had his weapon in the air when Corrigan reached him, apparently in one mighty bound. He twisted the club from the bluecoat's hand and threw it down the alley. The guardian of the law reached for his pistol, but never got it. Corrigan grabbed his wrist and twisted, dodging the officer's flailing other arm as he did so. The bluecoat tripped over the prone body of his victim and fell. Corrigan dropped on him, and for a moment there was a silent, deadly struggle.

The gun never made its appearance—Corrigan, although outpowered, saw to that. But for an instant a shrill whistle rent the air as the policeman finally succeeded in keeping one hand free for a moment. His beefy face was blazing with diabolical fury, and in the strength of his efforts the perspiration was dripping from every pore.

Shannon, who had taken no part in the lightning-fast events of the last minute, now raised a warning cry from the alley entrance. Thudding feet on the pavement bore out his warning.

Corrigan's eyes were blazing, and yet in his dark face there seemed to be little of wrath. It was rather excitement, the joy of the fight, which shone from his eyes and seemed to speak through the grimly smiling lips.

"Two more," came Shannon's voice, and Corrigan smashed down on the upturned face with all his strength.

His opponent shuddered, and grew quiet.

At the entrance of the alley Shannon was fighting with one policeman. The other seemed to have already taken the count. With a bound Corrigan leaped to the Kentuckian's aid, but did not arrive until another police whistle stabbed the night. Running footsteps from the street heralded the approach of curious onlookers, probably.

The other cop was put out of the running in short order, but down the street other whistles were shrilling, and the crowds were streaming toward the battle scene.

Shannon, laughing breathlessly, grabbed Corrigan's arm.

"Down this way!" he chortled like a happy boy, and the two men set off swiftly.

As they passed Corrigan's first victim, the undersized man the policeman had been clubbing got to his knees. They stopped to assist him, although the mouth of the alley was rimmed with eager onlookers already.

"— if it ain't Len Fleming! Come on, Len!" gasped Shannon.

The little man joined them at a staggering run, his face a mass of blood.

Corrigan never knew where they went that night. They twisted and turned and doubled, once forcing themselves to walk slowly across a street, only to resume their breakneck pace when they had disappeared down a deserted alley.

They finished up behind some evil-smelling garbage cans in a tiny courtyard. Little Fleming lay on his back, all in. Shannon breathed in great gasps, at intervals starting a laugh which died for lack of breath. Finally he recovered himself long enough to give vent to his mirth. He looked like a great overgrown boy as his dark eyes glowed warmly and his throaty, whole-souled laugh rang out on the chilling night air.

"What a start you got in Lexville, loot!" he chortled. "Len, what did Potts have you for?"

"Nothin' 'tall," mumbled the little fellow through bleeding, puffed lips.

Even in its present condition his countenance gave an impression of keenness.

"He's been after me ever since that row at the polls on election. He just caught me unawares by that alley and said he wanted to talk to me. He dragged me in there before I could help myself and started in on me."

"The loot here didn't waste no time comin' to your rescue."

"Why the ——— didn't you beat it, Shannon? You say you're in bad——"

"I am, but——"

"Tallow Waverly, y'mean?" asked Fleming, peering around a barrel to survey the land.

He finally decided it was safe to sit up.

"Uh-huh. O' course, Corrigan, I ain't in with this administration anyway, and if any o' those cops knowed me——"

"Why didn't you get away?" persisted Corrigan, getting to his feet.

He looked down at Shannon with an unreadable expression on his face, and waited for an answer.

"And leave you up that alley by yourself?" countered Shannon easily. "By the way, Len Fleming, meet Lieutenant Corrigan—just reportin' to the Air Service at Camp Tyler. Len was a first sergeant in the cavalry for four years, Corrigan."

"That so? Glad to meet you, Fleming. You're one of the old Brady political organization too, I presume."

Fleming nodded while he wiped busily at his face with a soiled handkerchief.

"Got to get out of town too, I guess," he said ruefully. "And, Will, you got more reason to than I have."

The thick-set Shannon did not answer for a moment as the three started toward the street.

"Just what sort of a mess are you boys in?" inquired Corrigan, glancing as if in new appraisal at each of his companions.

He looked longest at Shannon. There was an elusive something about the mountaineer which piqued his curiosity, and more than a few things which aroused his admiration. He sensed in the boyish-looking, powerfully built fellow an unusual quality, a combination of characteristics distinctly out of the ordinary.

Shannon glanced up at the flyer and then briefly over at Fleming.

"I'll tell you where we stand," he said as they turned into the street. "By the way, though, where are we bound?"

An empty taxi slipped along the street toward them, and Corrigan hailed it.

"I'm going to stay in town tonight," he decided. "Hop in, and we'll go to the depot and then back to a hotel."

Both Kentuckians demurred, but Corrigan insisted. They finally gave in. The taxi-driver peered interestedly at Fleming's face and the somewhat disheveled clothing of the others.

"Central station," directed Corrigan. "Now what's the yarn, Shannon?"

"Well, you know how politics is," said Shannon. "Durin' the last campaign o' course Mr. Brady was dead, so we lost. But Jack Davit and Len here and a few more of us had somethin' up our sleeves we was waitin' to pull—proof that some o' the cops was in on stealin' automobiles. We sprung it, but it didn't quite win for us. But it sure did get us all in bad—you can see how."

"For some reason 'r other they figured me as the chief guy——"

"In which they was right, for once," interjected Fleming, who was still trying to stanch trickles of blood. "Listen, lieutenant. Will, here, nosed around and got a idea what they was up to, and for months before election he was doin' an imitation of

a detective. It's a long story, but I'm tellin' you before his face that it was the keenest and nerviest piece of work ever pulled off in a campaign. It's a wonder he wasn't killed gettin' his evidence.

"When he got through he had 'em dead to rights. He had proof that a gang on the inside—not the real high-ups—was in on this auto-stealin' game. Well, we sprung it just before election. This here Tallow Waverly, who in addition to bein' in politics owns a distillery——"

"The guards on it have calluses on their wrists from bein' tied up so much, too," put in Shannon. "Tallow's robbed himself of enough whisky to float the navy."

"You said a chinful. Anyway Tallow is really the leader of the gang, and they fixed it up so's Tallow took all the blame, see? The others get off free, and the administration, as a reward for Tallow bein' the fall guy and savin' a political scandal, arranges to got him off with a big fine in front of one o' their judges, and besides they lets him open a restaurant and guarantees him protection for sellin' liquor there. Most o' the bootleg joints pays protection—he don't pay a dime."

Shannon took up the tale.

"They knowed it was me got wise to their auto-thievin', and so Tallow, as I understand it from Hite Cokley, a bookmaker that's supposed to be in with the administration but's really a stool-pigeon for us, is out to get me. He holds a grudge forever and a day. And he's got some o' the high-ups so dead to rights that they're bound to help him. If they ever catch me doin' anything it's railroaded to jail from now on for your Uncle Willy."

"And yet you fought those cops," commented Corrigan slowly.

"I ain't got no sense," grinned Shannon. "What was it you was sayin'? Most people are dumb-bells——"

"Of which you are the chief," laughed the flyer.

"But listen, Will," pleaded little Fleming earnestly. "Get out o' town. You can't fight 'em all. If any o' them cops recognized you——"

"They didn't. One of 'em never knew what hit him and the other was a new man. But I'm retirin' to my country place out to Cal Weatherby's farm for a while."

They drew up before the depot, and the

driver went in with Corrigan's checks. He reappeared shortly with two suit-cases. Shannon named a suitable hotel, and Corrigan ordered the driver to proceed.



WHEN they drew up in front of the ornate hostelry Fleming said:

"I'll slip in this other door and down to the washroom. I'll be up to your room later. That way I can wash up a little before goin' through the lobby, and you won't have to stand around so long."

The doorman took charge of the grips, and Shannon and Corrigan followed him into the lobby. They had not proceeded more than a few steps when Corrigan was accosted by a young woman with a fixed smile and a businesslike air.

"Won't you vote for Mary Delaney in the popularity contest?" she asked briskly. "The proceeds go to the fund to advertise Lexville. It's being run by the Boosters' Club, and——"

"No, thank you, I don't care to contribute," replied Corrigan and started to walk toward the desk.

He was not to escape so easily, however. The solicitor was depending on her victim's embarrassment and unwillingness to attract the public eye. She grasped his arm firmly and went on with her chatter. Grinning men stayed within earshot, and three or four other maidens stood in back of their spokesman to lend their support.

"Don't you want to help Miss Delaney? Haven't you any desire to see Lexville——"

Corrigan, the corners of his mouth in a sardonic downward droop, looked down at the chattering girl with unmoved calm as he said—

"I haven't the slightest desire to help Miss Delaney in any way whatsoever, and so far as what happens to Lexville is concerned, I don't care a single, solitary ——."

In the momentary silence Shannon's throaty chuckle reached Corrigan as he made his way to the desk.

He noticed a young officer in uniform leaning over the desk as he registered. The Army man turned slightly toward Corrigan, and a pair of wings on his breast became visible. The airman's eyes dropped to the register, and he looked up quickly.

"Beg pardon, Lieutenant Corrigan, but I see you are registering from Camp Henry. Are you the new man we're getting in the squadron? The name is the same——"

"I'm the man. Glad to know you, I'm sure."

"MacNeil's my name. Glad to know you."

He was a slender, freckle-faced youth with a crop of fiery red hair. The observant Shannon noted that he seemed somewhat in awe of Corrigan. His eager interest and palpable respect seemed unusual—Corrigan had stated his rank to be first lieutenant.

The three followed the bellboy up to the room to which Corrigan had been assigned. They had barely entered the elevator when young MacNeil remarked:

"Your coat is a little torn and there's a big smear on your trousers. Did you know it, Mr. Corrigan?"

"Had a little fracas with some cops," Corrigan confided *soito voce*.

MacNeil's amazed expression tickled Shannon. As they went down the hall MacNeil, bursting with shocked curiosity, demanded details, which Corrigan supplied calmly.

"Well I'll be ——!" exclaimed MacNeil, as soon as the bellboy had left. "Robert Corrigan in a street-fight!"

Corrigan, unpacking his grips, did not answer. Shannon looked curiously at MacNeil, wondering what was so remarkable about Robert Corrigan. He glanced over at Corrigan, and saw him take a bundle of what appeared to be magazine covers out of the grip. He tossed them into a dresser drawer carelessly.

"Are those some of your pictures?" asked young MacNeil quickly.

Corrigan nodded.

"May I look at 'em?" asked MacNeil.

"Sure, go ahead," replied the other flyer indifferently.

"What do you mean, 'your pictures'?" asked the puzzled Shannon.

"Didn't you know he was an artist—draws a lot of stuff for magazines?" MacNeil asked him. "Look here."

He spread the small heap of covers, which had been torn from the magazines they belonged to, and pointed out to the amazed Kentuckian a small "Robert Corrigan" sprawled in the lower right-hand corner of each. The pictures themselves were of the usual vapid girls, and the covers carried the names of some of the cheaper fiction magazines.

Shannon's round face literally beamed, and his eyes danced joyously.

"And Len Fleming and I laid behind garbage cans with you!" he chuckled. "Well, I'll be ——!"

As if Shannon's remark had recalled something to him, MacNeil arose and said:

"I've got to be going. See you all later."

He bolted out the door, slamming it behind him, and they could hear the rapid, subdued thuds as he walked swiftly down the hall.

Corrigan turned from his unpacking to meet the unfaltering gaze of Shannon's eyes. The airman laughed.

"Have I suddenly turned into a freak or something?" he enquired.

The door opened without warning, and Len Fleming came in. He still looked somewhat the worse for wear, but far more presentable than before. His thin, sharp-nosed face was wrinkled deeply around the mouth, and his narrow gray eyes were like slits. He still showed the effect of his four years along the border with the cavalry in the puckers around his eyes and the remnants of a deep tan on his face.

"Len, lookahere. Here's the guy that got you away from Potts," said Shannon, and exhibited the magazine covers with much enjoyment.

"Oh, for ——'s sake lay off. It's a trade, the same as politics," said Corrigan. "I'll order dinner for three served up here."

It was while they were gathered around the small, cluttered table that the conversation drifted to general topics. Fleming simply listened, while Shannon and Corrigan talked. More and more as time went on the Kentuckian displayed his interest in the flyer's ideas about life in general.

Without exception Corrigan stripped things down to bald essentials. His speech was positive, even dogmatic. He picked up an idea, shook it, tore off the camouflage, and left it naked before the world. Consequently his views about most things were distinctly unconventional.

"Lieutenant, how did you get this way?" asked Shannon finally.

There was no hint of facetiousness in his words.

"I never had no education, and I know there's lots o' stuff I never can get hep to for that reason. But I'd like to get next to your way o' lookin' at things. Look here. You're a flyer in the Army, and likewise a magazine artist. You must make plenty o' money. And I seen you beat up a cop,

and I heard you come out and bawl out that girl down in the lobby, and I listen to you talk and I get the idea strong that you don't give a —— for anybody else. If you won't get sore at me sayin' it, you don't give a —— for anybody else because you believe you got somethin' on 'em. Am I right?"

His words, spoken as if groping for expression of a thought which he could not quite get his hands on, made Corrigan smile.

"You're right in a way," he admitted. "I never hesitate to grant that I am unquestionably the most conceited man this far north. I am, and I know it."

"That's the first time I ever heard man or woman say that," remarked Shannon, eyeing Corrigan steadily. "Prob'ly for that reason I don't believe a word of it."

His laborious effort to understand the mental attitude of the flyer was evident in every lineament of his unwontedly serious face.

"Oh, I don't mean conceit as it's ordinarily manifested—illusions about my fatal beauty or ability or anything like that. I say I'm conceited—ahead of other people—because I believe I have the power of accurate self-estimate, and because, starting with that, I have laid out my life according to the way I want to live it, am living it that way, and have attained, through my own efforts, to everything I aspired to."

Shannon said nothing, but it was plain that he was still at sea. Corrigan yielded, for the first time in his life, to an impulse to explain himself to another.

"Here's what I mean. I am laboring under no delusions about my painting, for instance. I know I'm punk. I am not a real artist. I am workman enough with a brush to put on canvas characterless, empty faced, dumb-looking girls with straight noses and long eyelashes and cupid's-bow mouths. The magazines buy 'em. But I'm not an artist."

"When I was fifteen I was a hobo's gay-cat. I decided I needed ten thousand dollars a year to live comfortably. And from a kid I'd been kicked around, starved, worked until I fainted. So I grew into a passion for independence."

"I had a slight facility for drawing—no greater than a majority of people perhaps have in them. Most kids draw horses and cats and houses, you know. Even at fifteen I sat down and appraised myself and decided what my goal was."

"And then I starved and studied and worked, making no friends, thinking nothing but work. I learned my trade at an art-school nights, and did everything from selling mutton-chops in a market to driving a night-hawk taxicab to keep body and soul together."

"For four years I have known what it was to realize my ambition. I got into the magazines because I sat down and figured what they wanted and learned to paint it. I started painting half-undressed women for *Peppy Stories* and those magazines."

"And instead of the sniveling servility of those years I am independent. Really independent, I mean. Having known what it was to be broke and hungry, I'm not afraid of it again, and I won't yield an inch to anybody through fear."

"All my life there has been growing in me an increasing hatred of hypocrisy. If I am not myself in speech and action, I lose my self-respect. It's probably a reaction from my kid days, when I had to be a fawning liar or starve."

"Now I see," Shannon nodded. "And that accounts for this here lookin' out for number one——"

"Exactly. I've got sense enough to know that I am not exactly normal, probably because I've lived an abnormal life. And I don't care to change. The funny thing about it is that my main abnormality lies in the fact that I admit my characteristics frankly. If everybody else faced themselves without camouflage maybe I'd be normal after all."

"Why should I care what people in the lobby think of me because I wouldn't contribute to the 'Boost Lexville' campaign? I won't give a nickel to avoid embarrassment, because what is embarrassment to most people is not to me. Embarrassment is founded on other people's opinion."

"My ambition is fulfilled—I have no further aspirations whatever except to continue as I am. I don't want to be famous, I don't want to be very wealthy, I don't want to be a great artist and I don't care a hoot whether I live to be a hundred or not."

"I've got two friends—aside from them the rest of the human race doesn't interest me. I don't care whether they're uplifted or downtrodden. I've had my share of the tough breaks. Now that I've lifted myself to my present modest inconspicuous state of comfort, I refuse to give away any of my

money to help others. I haven't got enough, and I work too hard for what I have."

"Let them that's always had it, or has plenty, do it, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm all wrong probably, but that's the way I feel; and so long as I feel that way I'm not going to be forced, shamed or cajoled into doing it insincerely. My gifts are to individuals who appeal to me, like my two lone friends. I simply haven't any interest in anybody else but myself. I am absolutely selfish. The only difference between other people and myself on the score of conceit and selfishness is that I admit my characteristics frankly. I'm not on parade."

"And yet all the same I got the idea that if one o' them two friends o' yours was to need some help——"

"Of course. But even in helping them I'd be ministering to my own selfishness."

Shannon digested this for a moment and glanced over at Fleming, whose bright slits of eyes never left Corrigan's face.

"You crave to paddle your own canoe without no interference from nobody, and what they think about you don't make no difference as long as they'll let you paddle along. Is that it?"

Corrigan laughed.

"Just about. Don't think I run around expounding my views of life to everybody, either. This is an unusual experience for me, all around."

"It don't seem quite natural for a feller to be like you are, some way," stated Shannon slowly.

It seemed as if Corrigan grew five years older in a second. As his rugged face grew grave for a moment, lines of harsh bitterness seemed to materialize in a countenance that now seemed hewn out of granite.

"In all the years when I was fighting and clawing my way to a foothold I never got anything but kicks and abuse. Not a living soul ever helped me in any way whatsoever. I've got sense enough to know that my experience was unfortunate, and not a criterion by any means, but the fact remains. When I was weak and at their mercy people kicked me down, swindled me, despised me.

"I never had a chance to make the milk-and-water friends most people pride themselves on—thank God! I learned to depend on myself alone, and to be happy doing it. Until you, in your precarious position in Lexville, stayed with me this evening with

those cops I never had a living soul who ever gave up a thing important to help me. That is, except those two I spoke of. One of them is a professional gambler and the other is a Y. M. C. A. man."

"Why did you help Len out this evenin'?" asked Shannon.

"That was an impulse in which helping Fleming here didn't figure at all. He was being clubbed brutally. If a man I'd just seen murder somebody was being beaten with a club like that I'd go to his rescue to save my own peace of mind."

"And you tied into a cop——"

"Because I wanted to, and what I do I do and always shall do, God willing."

They talked until late over the stale remnants of dinner, and Corrigan impressed himself unforgettably on his two new acquaintances. Except when the conversation turned to his early life, he was rather more mocking than bitter. It was easy to see that he made absolutely no effort to disguise his opinions or beliefs.

IT WAS nearly midnight when he accompanied the two Lexville men, by devious routes, to the little soft-drink parlor run by Jack Davit. He met big, boyish-looking Davit and others who varied from frank-looking, likable scamps to sinister, cruel scoundrels whose faces told the world that they were criminals. Will told the story of Len Fleming's rescue to introduce Corrigan, and the big flyer was thereafter accepted without question.

He listened to stories of past political campaigns and of the devious way a politician moves, his wonders to perform. He sized up Davit and Shannon and some of the others as of the type which enjoyed the game more than the stakes. It was evident that they had been so accustomed to the tortuous methods used in Lexville politics that they were naive in their assumption that coercion of voters, falsifying ballots, or making moonshine were not genuine crimes.

"As naive as the million upright American citizens who buy booze every day," was his mental comment.

The others were obviously of different stuff. Fox-faced race-track men, thieves, crooked gamblers—all were represented. Whereas Shannon and Davit were fundamentally wholesome and frank, these others were shifty and sneaking.

Shannon was going to spend the night with Davit, so in the early hours of the morning Corrigan prepared to depart.

"Listen, Corrigan; drop me a line some time soon and drop down to the farm," said Shannon in parting. "Just this old feller and we'll be there, and there'll be plenty of milk and eggs and moonshine and hunting and fishing and——?"

"Enough!" laughed the flyer. "I'll be there some week-end. Just one word of advice. From all I've heard, you'd better lay low, Shannon. And listen."

They were standing close to the shaded door, a little apart from the group before the door. Nevertheless he lowered his voice as he said:

"I wouldn't trust some of these friends of yours too far. A few of 'em look like plain crooks to me, and stories to the contrary, most crooks are the yellowest men in the world."

Shannon nodded.

"You're right, lieutenant. And I'm gonna park out there for a long time. If there's any trouble about them cops this evenin', let Jack or me know right quick. We ain't able to do nothin' ourselves now, but we may be able to git somebody that can in your case. You're in the Army, and got to watch out."

"Thanks. Good night, everybody!"

II



HE WENT out to camp next day.

He would have been astounded had he known the extent of the interest with which the post was awaiting him. In the first place he was rather well-known throughout the Army because of his magazine work, and as soon as news of his prospective arrival had reached Air Service headquarters it had spread like wildfire over the whole camp. His reputation for eccentricity added piquancy to the expectation with which he was awaited.

Lieutenant "Snapper" MacNeil had supplied another item to add to Corrigan's reputation. MacNeil was young and impulsive, and he was entirely incapable of keeping to himself such a juicy morsel as that fracas with the law which had taken place the day before. He had no sooner left Corrigan's room than he made for the lobby of the hotel, and to officer after officer whom he met he confided the tale under

strict protestations of secrecy. He did have sense enough to relate it to none but Army men.

A few hours before Corrigan's arrival at the field the story was pretty well-known throughout the camp. The gaudy newspaper report of three unknown thugs who had feloniously tried to beat up Officer Potts added considerably to the vague rumors which had grown tremendously in the telling.

The airman had telephoned to the field, and there was a car to meet him at the depot. He was in uniform, and looked even bigger than he had in civilian clothes. The driver who took his grips as he alighted from the train kept watching him so steadily as they walked through the crowd that Corrigan was moved to ask—

"Is there a spot on my face or something, sergeant?"

"N-no, sir," stammered the nonplused soldier.

"Thanks. That relieves my mind. I——"

"We just heard quite a bit about you, sir, and I was kinda curious," the man apologized.

Corrigan laughed.

"Now I know what it means to be famous. Have you got a cigaret?"

The delighted soldier supplied him with a smoke, and then talked steadily during the mile drive to the field. The squadron's area was a full half-mile from the great artillery camp, itself, and was composed of four hangars, two sets of barracks, officers' quarters and various needed department buildings. The living-quarters and hangars were in two parallel lines, set on opposite sides of the road. The small, sloping field was east of the hangars. The area looked trim and well-cared-for despite the ramshackle, unpainted buildings. Lawns were well-kept and surrounded by neat white fences.

Corrigan walked into the small headquarters building, aware of interested eyes watching him from every side.

"Go right in, lieutenant," said the sergeant-major, and in a few seconds the big flyer was saluting a clean-cut, dark-eyed young man with a captain's bars on his shirt-collar.

The captain's face wrinkled in a wide smile as he surveyed his latest addition.

"Well, Corrigan, I'm glad to know you. My name's Flanders."

After shaking hands he leaned back again in his chair and once again grinned widely. The grin grew into a chuckle and then to a laugh.

"How do you like Lexville?" he inquired.

Corrigan laughed.

"Not so bad," he admitted. "Have you—er—been hearing things?"

"Considerable. However, we'll talk about that later. I'll get the orderly to show you your quarters."

However, before Corrigan could leave there was an influx of flyers into headquarters, and the new man met the whole outfit. They were true to type—young, sunburnt, with a curious impression of age about the eyes which belied the devil-may-care trend of their actions and conversation.

His baggage was all at the station, and after it had been delivered in a truck he spent the rest of the day fitting up the sitting-room and bedroom which comprised his living-quarters. The other flyers, strolling in at intervals, noted the several hundred books, original canvases and rather opulent rugs and table covers which were included in Corrigan's equipment.

At mess he was rather reticent. Big, blond Morrison, Snapper MacNeil, quiet Jim Broughton and another chap named Hamilton comprised the bachelors of the outfit, and Corrigan sized them up quickly.

Both Broughton and Morrison he knew and respected through their reputations. MacNeil was palpably youthful and impulsive, by far the least mature of the crowd. Hamilton was red-headed and genial, with a pronounced recklessness obvious in his face.

Corrigan spent most of the evening finishing his task of getting settled, and then accepted an invitation for bridge with Broughton, MacNeil and Morrison. He won ten dollars at a half-cent a point, and after the game had broken up and he had crawled into bed he mused contentedly:

"The layout looks good to me. Lexville, fine. Four bridge players, and a good C. O."

 IT WAS raining next morning, and for a matter of two weeks thereafter it did not cease, save for short intervals. Corrigan settled down to the quiet routine of existence, and bit by bit the other flyers came to understand him—not very thoroughly, but enough to appre-

ciate their newest addition. The big airman usually painted a couple of hours a day, and the rest of the time he spent mostly in reading. Never once did he indicate the slightest desire to seek out the others, or to take part in the social life of the post.

When one of them strolled into his sitting-room he was always cordial, but never by any chance did he make a visit to any one else's quarters. He accepted bridge invitations, but never suggested a game.

During those two weeks his reputation for eccentricity grew in Camp Henry. Numbers of artillery officers who chanced to be visiting the field and were introduced to him saw to it that their wives invited him to dinner shortly thereafter, but the presumptive lion courteously refused all invitations. His persistent avoidance of the post in general made him more or less a man of mystery. The only time they saw him was one evening when, through the dereliction of the cook, the bachelors were compelled to eat at the officers' club over in the main camp.

Snapper MacNeil yielded without argument to the request of a group of artillerymen and their wives that they be introduced to Corrigan, and after dinner was over lured him over to the lounging-room where they were sitting. Corrigan acknowledged the introductions pleasantly and listened with equal aplomb to sly gibes about his adventure in town from the men and a few gushing comments about his painting from some of the women. It was Mrs. Hawkshaw, elderly and nosy wife of a colonel who was away on temporary duty, who brought out that innate streak of perverse frankness and total disregard of the opinions of others which was one of his outstanding characteristics.

"Mr. Corrigan, I can't understand why a man of your reputation and ability should associate with denizens of the underworld. I——"

"Do you refer to any particular denizen?" inquired Corrigan.

"I don't just know what it was, but I was told by several people that in Lexville a week or two ago you, in company with two roughnecks, had got into a fight of some kind——"

"And you—er—disapprove?"

Mrs. Hawkshaw either did not notice, or disregarded, the warning gleam in the flyer's eyes.

"I do. Of course it's none of my business——"

"I'm glad you realize that," stated Corrigan softly.

For an instant there was dead silence. Mrs. Hawkshaw's sharp, pinched face did not change expression. She was deep in her favorite occupation, which was interesting herself in the affairs of others. She went on—

"But at the same time it seems to me too bad that you should waste your time with such associates, and drinking, and——"

She stopped, for she could think of nothing in particular to add. While it was fairly well established—so well that there had been talk of an investigation—that Corrigan had got into trouble in town, it was pure rumor which was responsible for the widely held opinion that Corrigan was a heavy drinker.

"My dear Mrs. Hawkshaw, you'll pardon me if I have to leave," said Corrigan, his mouth more sardonic than ever. "But with reference to what you say, I admit freely that I am a common, ordinary low-brow. So called 'nice people' are almost invariably so smugly uninteresting that I can't stand them, and I admit that I think their dinners, dances, teas and calls are the most utterly boring things I ever attended. Probably for that reason their opinion about me or my associates or actions doesn't interest me."

"But, my dear boy, have you no ambition?" purred Mrs. Hawkshaw.

She was of the type who at bottom lionize any one who by accident or profession is in the public eye, and feared she had gone too far. The other occupants of the lounge were listening wide-eyed with a combination of shocked surprise and consuming interest.

"None whatever," answered Corrigan. "Wait a minute. Yes I have. My ambition is to live to be ninety-nine years old and then get arrested for polygamy. Glad to have met you all, I'm sure. Coming, Snapper?"

MacNeil came along wordlessly. Their exit was made in silence, save for the half-suppressed titters of some of the more unregenerate men.

"It was probably a discourteous thing to do, but if anything in the world causes me to get peeved and waspish it is too much interest in my affairs taken by other people," Corrigan remarked to Captain Flanders when the C. O. had mentioned the

incident. "If only people will let me roll along quietly, as inconspicuous and unnoticed as though I were not here, that's all I ask. I'll do just what I want to do, and what they think of it doesn't make the slightest difference. Inasmuch as most people are gossips—men as bad as women—the less they know the less they'll be bothered."

"You're the queerest Army type I ever saw," observed Flanders.

"I hate the Army. Everything about it. Uniform, bugle calls, reveille, rank. But I love flying as a sport. I can stand the Army for a year or so for the privilege of flying."

"Then you plan to get out?"

"Just as soon as flying gets monotonous. How about breaking the laws of the United States, laying yourself liable to trial by court martial, setting a bad example to one of your officers, and in general committing a crime against God, man and the Army by taking a drink with me?"

Captain Flanders caught the mocking gleam in Corrigan's eye and with head thrown back laughed long and loud. The big flyer grinned as he shook up a cocktail.

"It's funny, but it's the truth. It's almost as droll as a great church, after long debate, continuing the ban on dancing and card-playing and theaters in this day and age, knowing at the time that by so doing they are making hypocrites out of even their few sincere members. Well, here's to the back of your neck!"

They drank, and the C. O. settled down for an evening's chat. It was surprising how often intelligent people found themselves irresistibly drawn by the originality of Corrigan's thinking.

And yet the captain had decided, before he left that night to return to his outraged wife, that the reason most people who knew Corrigan thought him strange and egotistical was because he was constantly tearing the mask from long-established and conventional ideas and principles, and more often than not succeeded in exposing the fundamental unworthiness beneath some outwardly altruistic structure. Withal he was strangely tolerant. Despite the mercilessness of his judgments on people, he always excused the individual on the ground that human nature has always been prone to blindness and bigotry and self-deception.



WILL SHANNON drove into camp in a buggy drawn by a fat little horse one evening when the rain was merely a sprinkle, to find Corrigan in his accustomed attitude—sprawled out in a Morris chair, feet on the desk, pipe in mouth reading the "Memoirs of Jacques de Casanova."

"Been at a mule sale all day for old Cal and couldn't do no good," Shannon explained, his round face wrinkled in a whole-souled grin. "Thought I might catch myself a bed in pay for this apricot brandy I brung along t' help pass the evenin'."

He produced the brandy from one capacious pocket of his coat, and shortly thereafter the two were deep in a discussion of Shannon's present situation with regard to Lexville.

"I been hearin' from some friends o' mine that Tallow and the crowd is layin' for me," Shannon stated. "But there ain't nothin' happened and their ain't nothin' can happen's long as I set out to the farm. Well, how's things been goin' out here to camp? Met Emmet yet?"

"No, I haven't. It would be a little embarrassing on both sides until I get to be more of a veteran around here. I'd better let the outfit get acquainted with me so there'll be no misunderstanding."

Shannon's eyes began to dance with that irrepressible spirit of youthful mischief as he replied—

"From what Emmet told me just now the whole camp ain't entirely ignorant that you're here!"

"I guess not. They're running true to form. I can go down to the club for a haircut and learn more about myself from the barber than I ever knew."

"It's a shame, you kiddin' old ladies—"

"Kidding nothing! I simply spoke my mind."

"Which you generally do."

From that time on the discussion was general. Corrigan became more and more impressed with the genial Kentuckian. Shannon's mind was constantly feeling its way forward through a maze of unknown ideas apparently, and in Corrigan it seemed that he had found a mental tonic.

"I ain't had no education—I know it and will admit it to some people—but I don't like to be told about it," Shannon remarked toward the end of the evening. "I been brought up queer, I guess, but lookin' back I can see that someway I always been

knowin' something that you said without realizin' it—that is, that the rarest thing in the world seems to be a man that thinks straight, with no self-deceivin' ruffles. Guys that can figure themselves like they would another man ain't standin' on every street corner."

III



FROM time to time during the next two weeks Corrigan thought about Shannon. He was a unique personality, and he greatly interested the Army man. As he grew to know more and more of the sub-stratum below the outwardly ordinary surface of Lexville politics the demeanor of Shannon during that street fight constantly assumed more significance. Fat, good-natured Emmet Brady, reared in the atmosphere of political and criminal plot and counterplot, never failed to emphasize the fact that Shannon was the most bitterly hated man in Lexville from the administration's viewpoint.

"If those cops had happened to know Shannon—they must have been green—he'd be in jail for half his life now!" the young soldier said one evening after he had become acquainted with his superior officer. "Will'd better stick to that farm for a long while, and he isn't too safe there. They'll frame 'im with half a chance."

Corrigan, idly thumbing the pages of a radical weekly to which he subscribed, was thinking of the young Brady's words one night when three weeks had passed without word from Shannon, who had promised to make a week-end visit to the camp. It was impossible to telephone him, for the farmhouse was five miles from the nearest settlement, and possessed no phone.

"It may be the rise in the river is keeping them marooned," he mused. "I believe I'll scoot over there tomorrow and have a look. It's possible he's in trouble."

His dark face lost its tinge of mockery as he mentally added—

"Men you can depend on when it costs 'em something are too rare to lose track of."

The following day was bright and clear, and although the ground was well-soaked from the continuous rain the sky was cloudless. Corrigan went directly to the line after breakfast and ordered the chief mechanic to have a De Haviland warmed up. Within five minutes the big four-hundred-and-twenty horse-power Liberty motor in his

ship was idling gently. Corrigan got helmet and goggles and then went in to see Captain Flanders.

"I'm going to run down Lexville-way and see if the Ohio has flooded out some friends of mine," he announced. "O. K.?"

"Sure thing. The river's sure up. Better keep inland quite a bit; the ground will be — soft for a forced landing near the river."

Corrigan nodded and went back to the line. The sergeant in the cockpit had the motor running half-open now, and the roar commenced to assume proportions that prohibited conversation within a hundred feet of the ship. Corrigan signaled the mechanic to get out, and climbed in to complete the warm-up himself.

A quick survey of the instrument-board showed air pressure at two and a half pounds, the voltmeter charging two, and oil pressure standing at thirty. The thermometer showed only sixty degrees Centigrade, so Corrigan, with a quick look around to make sure that mechanics were stationed at wing-tips and tail to hold the ship, slowly inched the throttle farther forward. The big bomber flattened its tires against the wheel-blocks, and out on the tail the man whose duty it was to see that the ship did not nose up had to hunch down and hold on as the six-foot propeller sent its terrific air-blast back.

In a moment the thermometer had crawled up to seventy. Corrigan adjusted his goggles, strapped his safety belt and made sure shutters were open and gas petcocks to the main tank turned on. He nodded to the mechanics, and in a trice blocks were removed and he was taxi-ing slowly up the field.

He turned at the top of the slope for a down-hill, cross-wind take-off. On that field the ordinary consideration which a flyer gives to the wind was unnecessary—or rather, useless, for an up-hill landing and a down-hill take-off were the only possibilities.

The spark lever was fully advanced, and the pilot fed his motor the gas with a gradual push on the throttle. The De Haviland hurtled down the slope, and in a hundred yards was flashing over the ground at seventy miles an hour.

For the next five seconds it was a case of depending on the motor alone—no skill could save the pilot if that drumming

Liberty failed. If even one cylinder cut out, there was nothing to do but go straight ahead into the line of stables rimming the lower end of the field. Not altitude enough to turn back into the field, too much speed to stop short of that boundary; and then the inevitable crash.

The motor did not fail, however. With stick pushed forward until the dizzily whirling propeller nearly scraped the ground Corrigan felt the ship leave the ground. He held it low for a moment to get all the speed possible, and then with stick and rudder lifted it in a climbing turn that left him a hundred feet high and at right angles to the course he had followed on the take-off. He banked again, and was speeding back up the field. If the Liberty failed now there was a chance to make a landing back on the field.

His glowing eyes roved over the complicated instrument-board to make sure that all was well. Then they fastened on the tachometer while he drew the throttle back until the needle stood at fifteen hundred revolutions a minute. This done, he put the ship in a gradual bank, and in a steady circle around the field it drove steadily higher.

At a thousand feet, according to the altimeter, he turned northward. The air-speed meter showed a little over a hundred miles an hour as he put the ship in a more gradual climb and set his course for the Ohio River, now plainly discernible eight miles away.

Corrigan still possessed a love of flying—he had been out of the Army for over a year after the armistice, and had not yet become blasé again. It was a satisfaction to him to survey the sixty feet of wing-spread which upheld him, and to listen to twelve mighty cylinders firing ahead of him.

The rays of the sun, catching the metal tip of the propeller, made a shimmering silver circle ahead and flashed back from the glass instrument covers. Below, the cleared fields held shining pools of water, and the low-rolling mountains which stretched southward were green and fresh in their Springtime covering.

It was not difficult to believe the tales of Shannon and Brady about the dark things that went on back there, far from the prying eyes and listening ears of metropolitan folk. It was an apparently unpopulated land of mountain and ravine

that lay quietly mysterious, seemingly endless.

To the north the Ohio had become almost a long lake. Its flooding waters had entirely covered the flat land along its banks in some places, and all along its length the backwaters of the flood stretched far inland like sizable rivers.

Corrigan, the altimeter now showing two thousand feet, banked slightly until the ship was flying directly up the river. Shannon had carefully described his abode, but there was no use of looking for it for a few minutes. Instead the pilot divided his time between his instruments and the country below. The débris of the flood was evident everywhere. It had receded somewhat the last two days, and the land which had been inundated was splotched with ugly wreckage.

In ten minutes the smoke-pall of Lexville was in sight ahead. The suburbs, like collections of tiny doll-dwellings, could be seen; but the city itself was hidden in an impenetrable mantle of gray. White roads, newly washed in the rain, converged from all sides, and shining railroads lay straight as arrows.

The airman swung inland until the eastern bank of the river was easily observable over the side of the cockpit. Shannon's present dwelling-place was directly on the river, and according to his description of it could be identified by means of two large barns forming a triangle with the white farmhouse, and a lane which curved crazily on its way from the little town on the Dixie Highway to the farm.

Corrigan kept a careful eye on the ground below, and in a moment picked up the farm. He glanced hastily at the crude map Shannon had given him, and made assurance doubly sure by banking northeast until the town of Odell, the terminus of the interurban was in plain view. The trolley track ended there.

There was a curious feeling of relief which flooded the pilot as he spiraled down over the farm and saw two men emerge from the house. All along there had been the subconscious idea that perhaps Shannon had been the victim of his enemies, even out there on the farm. From two thousand feet it was impossible to identify either man, but when one of them removed his cap and began waving it Corrigan was certain that it was Shannon.

He throttled the Liberty to twelve hun-

dred revolutions, and with left stick and rudder held the ship cocked up in a tight spiral which whirled the D. H. groundward in graceful circles. He conned the flat fields attentively, his mind busy with the possibility of landing. The backwater curved almost completely around the farm—at first glance it looked like an island. The main stream was even with the banks.

There was one field which was plenty large enough to land in, and in addition was covered with grass. From the generally dry appearance of the farm Corrigan judged that it sloped to the Ohio and that drainage was almost perfect. He decided to get down very low and give that pasture a close scrutiny.

He was a little less than a thousand feet high now, and the wires were screaming their high-pitched song as the speed-meter registered a hundred and thirty miles an hour. He drew back the throttle still farther and decreased his dive slightly to kill the speed. As he circled, more widely this time, his course took him beyond the tentacle of water which surrounded the farm.

Suddenly he leaned far over the side, his eyes glued to the figure of a man which seemed to be crouching in the thick, newly budded undergrowth that rimmed the water-filled ravine. There was not a house nor a building of any kind within three miles, save the farm which was his destination. And that man gave every appearance of wanting to hide from the plane. It was very probable that he was entirely invisible from the ground.

Another swing around the farm assured him that the field was a fair landing possibility, although by no means safe. But now Corrigan had an urgent reason for landing. He did not like the looks of that crouching man down there, in the light of Shannon's position.

The wisp of smoke rising from the farmhouse chimney was streaming southward—evidently there was a light north wind. This was fortunate, for the field paralleled the Ohio, north and south. Corrigan drove southward for nearly a mile, turned, and straightened out three hundred feet high for his field. He increased the motor speed a trifle—just enough to keep the ship in the air with the aid of a gradual dive.

The speed-meter hovered around seventy-five miles an hour on that glide, only five

miles above the minimum speed at which the ship would stay in the air. Subconsciously he noted the two men, who were now at the edge of the field, waiting for him. With his head over the side, one hand on the throttle and the other on the stick, he concentrated every effort on making the slowest possible landing in that soft ground.

A hundred yards back of the boundary fence he was mushing down rapidly, but a stab at the throttle caught the drop downward, and the De Haviland, only fifty feet high, roared across dozens of terrified pigs in a small pasture. Well back from the fence he cut the gun entirely, and sudden silence fell which was broken only by the whine of flying and landing wires. He dropped over the fence with a few feet to spare, and as he leveled out above the ground pulled up the nose of his ship. It stalled momentarily, ten feet high, and then dropped in a beautiful stall landing. It hit with little forward speed, and the dig of the wheels into the soft ground killed most of that. For a moment the pilot held his breath for fear the ship would turn turtle, but it did not, and came to rest with more than half the field still unused.

A stocky figure in hip-boots came plunging toward him, followed more dignifiedly by a short, pudgy man with a very round face. Corrigan turned off the gas petcocks and jazzed the throttle a trifle. In a moment the gas in the carbureter was run out, and the propeller died in gradually slowing turns. As he clicked off the switches a familiar voice came to his ears.

"Hi, loot! Been lookin' for you. You're welcome to your job landin' this thing, though."

The flyer shook hands before he climbed out. He pushed up his goggles and slumped back in his seat for a moment, gazing at the smiling face which showed just above the side of the cockpit.

"I thought you were going to telephone," Corrigan remarked.

"Couldn't. Flood makes it too much trouble to git to Odell. Meet Cal Weatherby, my boss these days."

The round little old man, who was attired in overalls and a gray sweater, smoking a short pipe, peered at Corrigan through his gold-rimmed glasses and smiled genially.

"This lazy good-for-nothin' Will here's been talkin' about you considerable," he remarked.

His eyes shifted to take in the ship.

"Some contraptions, ain't they?" he added.

"Well, ain't yuh gonna git out?" demanded Shannon.

"As soon as I get the old pipe going," returned Corrigan, suiting the action to the word.

He vaulted out, pipe in mouth. Both other men looked at him appreciatively. In his leather coat, tight-fitting helmet and soft field boots he looked the part of a rider of the air, and the power which was ordinarily camouflaged behind his slouching ease was now apparent.

"Will, I don't suppose Mr. Weatherby here is ignorant of your—er—position in town?" demanded Corrigan.

"Not by a — sight," interjected the peppery little old man. "Think I'd be keepin' such a useless farmhand if he wasn't in trouble?"

He peered belligerently over at the over-alled, unshaven Shannon, and behind the big glasses the keen old eyes were soft.

"Well, when I was coming in I saw a man hiding in some bushes over on the other side of that little finger of water that runs right through there."

He made a little gesture, imperceptible at any distance, northward to the fringe of undergrowth which showed, nearly a quarter of a mile away. "Now, what is a man doing over there all by himself, trying to hide in some bushes, unless——"

He stopped and looked at Shannon. The Kentuckian's full, tanned face seemed suddenly longer, the jaw outthrust and the big brown eyes narrower and harder. He took off the rough cap he wore and ran stubby fingers through his thick, black hair.

"He's watchin', I reckon," he said with soft deliberation.

Mr. Weatherby's face was troubled, and for a moment he forgot to puff his dilapidated pipe. He rubbed his jaw, bristling with white stubble, and asked—

"You don't believe, Will, that——"

"Sure I do. And how'm I gonna find out fur sure? I couldn't get within five hundred yards o' this guard—there ain't no cover——"

"You think it means that this Tallow Waverly's gang is starting a campaign to get you?" asked the flyer crisply.

"You're — right I do. That feller is there to make sure I'm here when the deal is pulled off."

Corrigan drew on his pipe and gazed absent-mindedly toward the wide-spreading Ohio.

"Tell me one thing, Shannon. They've got nothing on you, have they? I mean this is bound to be a frame-up?"

Shannon nodded, meeting the airman's level regard with unwavering eyes.

"I'd tell you," he stated simply. "And what am I gonna do? As I said, if we're right about Tallow gettin' busy the minute I come within a mile o' this guard he'd be off like a scared rabbit. And I know that gang well enough to know that jest sittin' around and bein' watchful ain't gonna do no more good than knittin'."

"I'll be gone an hour or two," decided Corrigan. "I may be able to interview this bird, and I may bring him back. I guess, according to what you say, that the only way to get hep to their game is to get him to come clean with all he knows."

There was momentary silence. Weatherby held his pipe motionless and stared at the tall, khaki-clad flyer in speechless amazement. Shannon's gaze was on the ground, but once or twice he glanced swiftly up at the rugged face framed in the helmet.

"Thanks, loot," he said finally. "But to be frank about it, I understand you ain't in so good down to the camp now. Mixin' in this'll kill yuh off. The thing for me to do is get into the boat, go across the river and beat it. I hate to run, but you can't fight Tallow Waverly and half the police force on this frame business—not unless your gang's in power. I——"

"Beat it ——!" barked Corrigan. "The chances are they've got liquor or something planted now. They'll figure Weatherby here your friend, and are likely to take it out on him."

"That's right too," nodded Shannon.

"Let the lieutenant go. It can't do no harm," put in Weatherby.

"But if there's any trouble——"

Corrigan's laugh rang out in the quiet, sunlit air.

"Don't I look worried about what the Army, from the Chief of Staff down, thinks of me?" he inquired.

Shannon's round face lighted up, and there sprang into his eyes again that unquenchable gleam of mischievous joy in the game for its own sake.

"You're on," he chuckled. "—— if I don't hope we're right. That'll give us a

chance to throw a couple o' curves around game for their necks."

"See you later—maybe with company," said Corrigan throwing his helmet and goggles into the cockpit of his ship.

He started to walk across the field, parallel with the line of trees which indicated the backwater. It would be necessary to go a mile or more before the end of the water came and he could get across. It was hard walking through the soft field, but his long strides ate up the distance with deceptive speed.

Despite his pondering on possible coming events, he found time to wonder at the scene about him. Less than ten miles away was one of the country's biggest cities, and five miles northward the Dixie Highway was carrying a continuous stream of automobiles. And yet, for all visual evidence to the contrary, he might have been fifty miles from a town, ten miles from the nearest neighbor. Except for Weatherby's old-fashioned house there was not another sign of human habitation.

Across the river hills rose almost from the banks, and not a boat, a telephone wire, a road, or even the noise of an automobile interfered with the buzzing undertone of a myriad of insects. In the golden peace of spreading fields it was difficult to believe that possibly living evidence of a deadly drama about to open might be lurking within a mile.

IV



IN FIFTEEN minutes he had reached the end of the water itself. He was compelled to slip down the sides of the shallow ravine, slop through oozy mud at its bottom and then haul himself laboriously up the other side. His formerly immaculate field boots were caked with mud when he emerged on the other side, and his shirt and breeches were covered with débris. He brushed himself off and considered his approach. He decided to walk down along the bank of the coulée. There was no way of concealing his approach from any direction.

Before long he came in sight of the particularly thick growth which had held the man he was after. Whistling, he slowed his pace and walked along unconcernedly. He saw that his prospective victim must have had a clear view of the colloquy between himself and the other two men, but on the

other hand the ship was so far away that any idea of the import of their conversation was impossible.

"Just here to make sure Shannon don't strike out for town," he opined, keeping a wary eye on the bushes ahead.

As he came within a few feet of them his probing eyes discovered his man. The stranger immediately began making some noise as if he realized that he must be seen and wanted to provide an excuse for his being there.

"Morning!" Corrigan hailed cheerfully. "Got a rabbit?"

"Nah—cuttin' a cane," came the nasal answer.

Corrigan stopped, filled his pipe, lighted it and then said:

"That's a good idea. I've got to plow through the mud over to Odell to a telephone—I guess I'll cut one. You won't mind lending me your knife, will you?"

The all but invisible watcher grunted something indistinguishable. He made his way through the shrubbery and in a few seconds crashed through into the open. His clothes were soaked from the moisture of the half-formed leaves, and his trousers and shoes were a mass of mud. In his hand he held a diminutive cane.

He was an undersized fellow with a ludicrously large head. His pimply face was round, and in mouth and eyes he showed a hardness that was far from prepossessing. His shifty gaze met the flyer's only at intervals.

"Out for a hike?" Corrigan inquired easily, making no move to come nearer.

"I—lost a dog, and I was looking for him," was the hesitant answer. "You're the guy in the airplane, are you?"

Corrigan nodded, his impression of the other growing more and more unfavorable. He noted the bulge in the man's coat pocket. The wet cloth outlined a pistol with fair accuracy.

"Forced landing," he said. "I've got to tramp clear to Odell to get to a phone and secure some help. I was lucky to get down safe. Where is the road—that one there?" pointing to a muddy lane ahead.

A gleam of relief showed in the other man's restless eyes as he nodded.

"Mind lending me your knife?" asked the Army man as he strolled up to the other.

"Go ahead."

As he held out the knife he pulled his

large-peaked cap lower over his forehead, as if to hide his countenance.

Corrigan put out his hand to take the knife. With a move so sudden that it took his victim completely by surprise both hands shot out and each gripped a thin, bony wrist in a vise-like clasp.

For perhaps ten seconds his captive twisted and squirmed with strength born of the panic which twisted his face into a snarl and blazed from eyes that were suddenly like a cornered rat's. Finally, wordless, he ceased and stood panting, eyes downcast.

"Listen," said Corrigan. "You won't be harmed if you're all right. You're going with me over to that farmhouse, and Mr. Will Shannon and I will find out just the reason for you lurking around in the bushes out here. Understand?"

As soon as Shannon's name was mentioned utter fear twisted the repulsive face.

"Mister, I ain't doin' nothin'," he whined. "For God's sake don't take me over there. Whaddaye want? I——"

With leg and arms Corrigan threw his opponent flat on the ground. Astride his stunted body, he clamped the man's left arm with one knee and quickly drew the pistol from his pocket.

"You're going, whether you want to or not. You don't think Shannon isn't wise to Tallow Waverly and all his plug-ugly gang, do you?"

His shot in the dark told heavily—so obviously that the big pilot grinned.

"Now listen. You're going—either on your own two feet or over my shoulder, dead to the world. Which do you want?"

"I ain't done nothin', and I'm not goin'!" shouted the other in a momentary flash of spirit.

It seemed that there must be something of which he was terribly afraid over at the Weatherby farm, for his body was trembling on the ground and his fleshy face was pale and moist.

"Oh, yes you are," returned Corrigan gently.

With the butt end of the gun he tapped his man none too gently just over the temple. It was a good job, for there was neither motion nor speech on the part of the stranger for some little time thereafter.

Corrigan looked around for some possible means of securing his prisoner, but not even clothing presented possibilities safe

enough to chance. Finally he used the man's stick to plumb the backwater. It was less than five feet deep apparently.

For a moment the pilot hesitated. Somehow he had the idea that haste might be imperative. To his mind it was as certain as anything could be that plans were under way for the subjugation of Will Shannon. And there was no telling what those plans were, or how soon they would be brought to fruition. The presence of the stranger in itself was an indication that the climax was not far away.

He swung the limp body to his shoulders with an easy swing that was surprizing, even to one who had noted the breadth of his shoulders and the symmetrical perfection which made his physique look far smaller than it really was. Without hesitation he waded into the turgid, quiet water.

It was a nasty job, but he accomplished it. The soft bottom sucked at his feet, and the foul water seemed half-solid, holding him back. Finally, breathless and nearly spent, he staggered up the other bank and threw his burden to the ground. There was still no sign of returning consciousness.

After a moment's rest he again resumed his load and made his way slowly but steadily across the fields. He had gone less than two hundred yards when he saw Shannon and Weatherby emerge from the farmhouse. They had kept well out of sight evidently until sure that Corrigan had accomplished his mission.

With a sigh of relief the flyer dropped the stranger again and lighted his pipe. Shannon was running through the soft landing-field, and in a moment had crossed the fence into the field where Corrigan awaited him. He slowed to a walk, breathing hard.

"Wh-what happened?" he puffed from a hundred yards away.

"I had to take a gun away from him and caress him on the coco with it," returned Corrigan. "I'm sure we've got something, Shannon."

"It wouldn't surprize me none," was the reply as the Kentuckian approached. "You sure are a sight. Did yuh wade that ditch there?"

"Uh-huh. I couldn't carry this bozo all the way around, and I had a hunch that—"

He stopped abruptly as he saw the slow change in Shannon's round face. He had stopped a few feet away from the prone figure, and without a word having been spoken Corrigan saw that good-humored countenance change into the outward semblance of some one he did not know. The merry dark eyes were opaque and sinister—the slightly curled lips now thin and giving the impression of a snarl without really twisting into the physical semblance of it. Shannon's great fists were doubled until the nails bit into the flesh. Suddenly Corrigan remembered the terror which had been reflected in the face and speech of his prisoner at the suggestion that he see Shannon.

For a moment neither man broke the tranquil silence which brooded over the steaming landscape. Then—

"Some one you know, Will?"

Without taking his eyes from the unprepossessing face staring up from the ground, Shannon nodded slowly.

"Sammy Fall," he said slowly. "We have got something."

He looked up at Corrigan, and for a moment his smoothly sinister face softened. It changed little, if at all, outwardly—it was rather a matter of the spirit which showed through and subtly changed the whole cast of his countenance.

"Let's get him to the house before he comes to," he said shortly.

Corrigan asked no questions as they carried Fall across the field. Weatherby was waiting at the fence. Corrigan told his experience with Fall and mentioned his random thrust about Tallow Waverly, and his belief that it had been effective.

For the first time Shannon spoke.

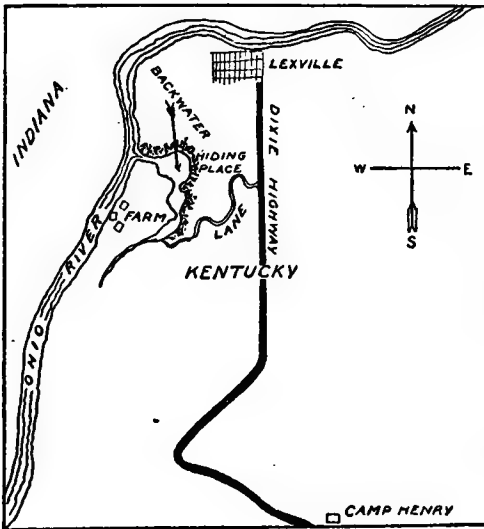
"Sure," he said.

The pilot looked at him curiously. More and more he felt that the unreasoning fear that Fall had shown—a fear which seemed far too great to spring from Corrigan's bare suggestion—was being explained. For if ever he had looked upon the face of a possible killer, it was now. In some way the very immobility of the Kentuckian's face, outwardly the same and yet unmistakably deadly by some subtle emanation of spirit, was more impressive than it would have been had it been twisted with rage. Corrigan wondered briefly whether he knew Shannon as well as he thought he did.



THEY passed a ramshackle barn, and made their way precariously by means of muddy planks across an old-fashioned barnyard. A litter of pigs, dozens of chickens and two mules shared the precincts and watched incuriously as the men picked their way across the planks which upheld them from the mud.

More chickens, three dogs, and at least twice as many cats were congregated on the wooden flooring just outside the door of the old-fashioned, dingy-white farmhouse. Corrigan had to stoop to get in the door. They threw Mr. Samuel Fall in a big chair after dispossessing a puppy and a kitten who were sharing it.



It was a low-ceiled, unpapered kitchen, furnished with some shelves which held dishes, an old-fashioned wood-burning range, and a table covered with oilcloth. Lamps were upheld in wrought-iron sockets, and a great heap of wood in a woodbox behind the stove provided the last touch to make the picture complete. There was not a jarring modern note in the whole interior, from the smoke-stains on the ceiling to the sugar-bowl on the table.

Weatherby, silent and interested, lighted a corn cob and sat down, never taking his eyes from Fall until Shannon, without a word and with his head bent thoughtfully, started out to the rain-barrel after some water. Then Weatherby met Corrigan's eyes, nodded at Shannon's bulk going out of the door and shook his head—whether

in admiration, wonder or sadness Corrigan could not judge.

Shannon was outside for two or three minutes. When he returned his woodsman's cap was pushed back on his head, and he smiled. He bore a pan of water.

"Well, I'm startin' to work on him," he vouchsafed, and the air of the room seemed to lighten.

His methods of work were simple and direct. He laid Fall on the floor, remarking as he did so, "You must have give him quite a swat, loot," and loosened the soiled white collar. Then he dashed the full pan of water into his face.

Fall's eyes opened after a preliminary flutter or two, and stared straight up into Shannon's down-bent face. Corrigan, watching closely, could not help but pity Fall. In fact, the airman turned away for a moment rather than look at the spectacle of a man in the grip of terror so great that it literally held him powerless. If he had been looking a horrible death in the face then his eyes could not have been more terrible.

"Well, Samuel?" inquired Shannon, without moving.

In the velvet of his voice and the words themselves was menace. Corrigan, ever the detached, analytical spectator, listened, watched and wondered. Never had he seen a human being who could radiate the spirit within him as could Shannon, without noticeable physical concomitants. It was the emanation of a personality so strong that it transcended the more ordinary outward manifestations which usually accompany any inward emotion.

Fall's eyes darted from Corrigan's face to Weatherby's. Both men stood above him, while Shannon was on his knees beside him.

He licked his lips with his tongue, and seemed to be trying to speak. His bloodless lips moved, but no sound came from them. Occasionally his eyes would dart to the implacable Shannon, only to shift as if the sight was unbearable.

The sight of a craven in the throes of utter fear is never pleasant—in the case of the unprepossessing Fall it made him so repugnant that, despite the pity he felt, Corrigan felt a sudden desire to see the man get what he feared. It was as if he were a rat or a snake, too vile and contemptible to be pitied.

"Well, talk, — you!"

Shannon crouched lower. As the two, motionless on the floor, stayed immobile for a moment they were like two wild beasts—the stronger playing with his weaker victim.

Corrigan took a step forward.

"Let me handle him, Will," he said crisply.

Neither move nor answer came from Shannon; but Fall's eyes turned upward pitifully.

"I said, let me handle him!"

So suddenly that it was a surprise to Weatherby as well as to the others, Corrigan's hands gripped Shannon under the arms and jerked him to his feet. The Kentuckian turned toward the flyer, and his eyes were as unreadable as if made of ink.

"Don't be a fool, Shannon. Fall's badly scared, and you'll never get anything out of him treating him as a cat would a mouse. I——"

Without the slightest change in his face Shannon leaped forward. Corrigan, having surmised certain things to his satisfaction, was ready. The butt of the pistol crashed down on Shannon's head with cruel force. He dropped like a log.

It had happened so quickly that Fall had not had time to stir. Corrigan turned to Weatherby, and a whimsical smile lighted his face.

"I may be wrong, but I figure it was best," he stated. "Now Fall, you talk! What's the lay—what has Tallow Waverly got framed on Shannon here?"

Fall's face contorted, and in the greatness of his relief he sobbed.

"I'll talk, lieutenant, honest!"

His story came from him in a torrent of words. The night before, five men had come down the river in a boat, carrying a fifty-gallon still with them. They had installed the still in a cave, prepared the previous night, which had been dug into the side of a bluff a half-mile from the farmhouse. It was the only slope for several miles which was above the water-mark, and it was also on Weatherby's farm. Mash, copper utensils, worm, kegs—all had been brought until a moonshine factory was apparently in operation. Crone, prohibition-enforcement agent, and two other men in the pay of Waverly were scheduled to come down the river almost any time, spot the still and arrest Shannon for it.

They also might plant some liquor, already made, in the house after the arrest.

"They're layin' for him, and they'd a got him," whispered Fall. "He'd 'a' got the limit—fine and the hoosegow. And they was figurin' on maybe confiscatin' your farm, Mr. Weatherby, under that new law. I——"

"You dirty, low-down, sneakin' ward heeler!" burst out the old man in crack-voiced fury. "Why didn't ye let Will kill 'im, Corrigan? Great God—if——"

"The thing to do's to get busy!" snapped Corrigan. "Get water for Will while I tie Fall. Or is it wise to wake him up?"

Weatherby, under the influence of the flyer, retained his equilibrium as suddenly as he had lost it. He nodded.

"Only twice before, fur's I know, he's got that way. Once this here Fall and three others was in the hospital. Will mashed 'em up terrible with his bare hands. It was over old man Brady—Will and the boys worshiped him, ye know. These four birds about like Fall, called Brady somethin' in Mike Leary's restaurant and when they got through Will has near killed 'em all. He's poison when he gets like that, and he's been wonderin' so much about Tallow Waverly that I guess he went a little off his head fur a while. I'd risk it. We'll need him."

V



CORRIGAN took no chances. After Fall was safely bound he laid a stick of wood on the table, ready to his hand, and started splashing water into Shannon's face. In a moment the long-lashed eyes opened, and the Kentuckian looked up into the smiling face of Corrigan.

For a moment there was a puzzled look in his eyes, and then he smiled. Before either one of his relieved friends could speak he burst into a rollicking laugh that abruptly relieved the tension.

"I remember now," Shannon chuckled boyishly.

He hopped to his feet smartly, and looked down at Fall.

"I told everything I know to the others," whined Fall quickly. "I was just on guard to make sure you was here when they come. I——"

"What was it?" interrupted Shannon.

Corrigan, in about three concise sentences, told him the scheme.

"It's everybody busy and get that still destroyed before they get here," he concluded. "You know where it is from Fall's description?" he went on.

"Uh-huh. Only one place it could be."

"Well, for God's sake let's get tools and go to it!" said old man Weatherby excitedly.

"Fall's evidence—" began Corrigan, but Shannon interrupted him.

"The minute he gets out of our hands he'll say nothin'. He'd doublecross his grandmother to get her false teeth to pawn. Up in court his testimony'd have us all up for assault and battery besides 'shinin'. The tools are in the barn."

Corrigan was watching Shannon closely, striving to detect his reaction to the recent swift embroglio. As the Kentuckian finished speaking there was an instant of silence, and the eyes of the two men held. Once again Shannon was fundamentally boyish, as different from the human menace of a short time before as daylight from darkness. In his eyes there appeared that flicker of enjoyment which Corrigan had seen before.

"You done right, lieutenant," grinned Shannon.

"I thought maybe I did," returned Corrigan, and over at the side Weatherby breathed to himself—

"Well, I'll be ——!"

Then he threw his pipe on the table and said aloud:

"Here we are talkin' like ninnies. We got to get busy, Will!"

"Just a minute," interjected the airman. "Fall, when did you say these booze-terriers and double-cross artists were due?"

"Almost any time, lieutenant!" returned Fall eagerly. "They——"

"Shannon, you untie Fall and make him work. I've got an idea in my head that I may be of more use somewhere else. Weatherby, suppose you take Fall out after the tools while Shannon helps me crank the ship."

"What——"

"I'm going to look over the land. Before you can get all evidences of the still out of the way they may be down here. Where is their boat? Or am I wrong in thinking you said they'd come by boat?"

"Up to the distillery. They're comin' by boat to sneak up——"

"You can't miss it—six miles from here,

near the bank of the river," stated Shannon. "Great big factory-lookin' place—good pier——"

"I've got you. I'll only be a few minutes. Come on!"

Without question Shannon followed him while Mr. Weatherby started untying Fall.

"The ——est pair I ever seen!" he mused to himself as his stiff, gnarled fingers worked clumsily. "I can't see what in Tophet that flyer is up to, but if he's thinkin' as fast as he did when he hit Will it's all right."

VI



CORRIGAN surveyed the field carefully, estimating with a practised eye the distance available for the take-off. Before he and Shannon had reached the ship he had decided that it would not be too great a risk to take off from where the ship was standing. It would save a good deal of valuable time, too—time that might be more valuable than seemed possible.

He was strangely certain that Shannon was really in immediate danger. It was unbearable to think of leaving a stone unturned in an effort to circumvent the conspirators. As he climbed in the cockpit and primed the motor while Shannon obediently twisted the propeller there was a half-formed decision in the pilot's mind—a decision that was important in more ways than one. What he was about to do seemed foolish, but he was as certain as if he had already looked over the ground that it was best.

"All right; get away from it!" he yelled, and snapped on both switches.

He set spark and throttle, the latter barely one notch forward. This done, he climbed out again.

"You stand next the prop and get your hand on it—don't move it! Swing with me on 'One' and 'Two,' and on the 'Three' count I'll pull you through."

Without a word Shannon set himself, and the flyer gripped his wrist with both hands. They swung to the count. On "Three" he jerked Shannon back with a mighty heave. The combined power of both men spun the propeller like a toothpick against the powerful compression of twelve great cylinders.

The Liberty caught and idled at slightly excessive speed, but Corrigan got around

to the cockpit quickly and pulled the throttle back.

"All right!" he shouted, and Shannon's short legs began to cover the ground between the ship and the barn with choppy strides.

Corrigan, his guiding hand on the throttle, watched him smilingly, a curious softness in his eyes.

"—, what a relief from the ever present neutrals!" he observed cryptically.

It seemed as if the Kentuckian had an infinite number of facets to his character, he mused as he absently proceeded with the warm-up. It was clear that he was a master in the political game, with its many-sided requirements. He was as unmoral as a savage, so far as statutes made and provided were concerned, and yet strangely simple and honest in fundamentals; totally untutored, and yet possessed of a resilient mind which seemed constantly groping ahead in realms unknown; within him, pent up, the bestial savagery of the primitive people from whom he had sprung; and yet he was capable of forgiving a man who had foiled him by force. And woven through the warp and woof of his complex character was that all-pervading boyishness which turned all life-problems into a contest of wit and strength.

"Alone in his class!" Corrigan decided, the while his eyes watched thermometer, oil and air-pressure gages, and all the other instruments which strew the dashboard behind a Liberty motor.

He hurried the warm-up in a manner that was not good for the motor. When the centigrade indicator showed sixty he shoved the spark all the way ahead and put on helmet and goggles. A quick look ahead, and his hand began shoving the throttle steadily forward. For a moment the inertia of the ship, plus the mud, kept the D. H. motionless, but as soon as it started it picked up speed rapidly. The air was thick with flying mud-balls, and the pilot mentally appealed to the flyer's gods. A broken propeller would mean more than it was easy to realize.

Nearer and nearer loomed the low fringe of fruit-trees; but there was nothing to do but keep on, straight ahead. He rocked the ship with the stick in an endeavor to lift the wheels from the sucking, water-soaked ground.

Fifty feet from the trees it took the air.

For a second he held the nose down to gain that infinitesimal portion of speed, and then pulled almost straight up. The tail-skid dragged through the branches, and like a flash he nosed down. The two-ton ship settled-loggily, and for a breathless second or two he fought it off the ground. He scarcely had flying speed; but the wheels did not touch. In a moment it had picked up speed again, leveled out as it was, and roared away toward its goal, fifty feet high.

Two hundred feet was all the altitude necessary, Corrigan decided. He flew out over the middle of the river, his eyes bent steadily on the shore-line. In two minutes he was in sight of a great building that should be the distillery. Straining his eyes ahead, he saw a boat moored well out from the bank. He dropped back in his seat with a sigh of relief. At least the plotters had not started yet. If they had been on the way—

Like a bullet the De Haviland flashed across the boat. It was tied with a long rope. Corrigan's mouth suddenly tightened as he leaned over the side to get better observation.

There were four men on the little landing, and one of them was fumbling with the rope. The party was about to start.

Corrigan was not greatly surprised. He had felt all along that time was short. And in an instant he had made up his mind. There was no other boat within sight, and the solution presented itself to him in the flicker of an eyelash. His eyes began to glow behind the big goggles, and he threw back his head and laughed. It was soundless below the drone of the wide-open motor, but it was hearty none the less.

"What a morsel for Camp Henry this'll be!" he thought, to the total exclusion of any reflections about his own possible safety.

He banked steeply, a few hundred yards beyond the staring little group on the landing. This done, he calmly cut both switches. With a loud pop the motor back-fired, and was silent.

The De Haviland dived steeply down over the turgid water. With one hand Corrigan pushed up his goggles, while with stick and rudder he kept the ship headed directly toward the boat.

Fifty yards back of the boat he was still fifty feet high, so he nosed down yet farther. He kept his head over the side a

few seconds more, his eyes swimming with tears generated by the speed and lack of goggles. Satisfied, he pulled back his head and flung his right arm in front of his face. Just as he relaxed in the seat came the splintering crash of the collision, and then a mass of muddy water swirled above his head.

As if in a dream he unsnapped his belt. The ship had not turned over. He floated to the surface, and strove to grasp at the uptilted fuselage with his right arm, but it did not answer to his will, although there was no pain. With his left arm he succeeded in grasping the tail-skid.

Running figures on the shore, seen vaguely and meaning little to him, finally impressed themselves on his consciousness enough to cause him to attempt a shout. It was a feeble effort. They were apparently so excited that they had no idea what to do. The pilot, however, finally cleared his brain sufficiently to realize that the rope which had been tied to the boat was floating near him.

He risked taking the few strokes necessary, and reached the rope. He hung on with his one hand like grim death until he was hauled ashore. A stout, rather good-natured looking man bent over him as he collapsed on the landing. He did not notice what the men were saying for a moment. Then he opened his eyes and looked up at them with a twisted grin.

"Thanks, everybody," he said.

"You're welcome!" responded the fat man. "You busted our boat—I guess you know that—pretty near as bad's your plane. Motor go bad?"

"Uh-huh. I'll gladly pay for the boat—or the Government will."

His head was clearing steadily, and he found time to note that the prohibition man was far from unprepossessing. He was apparently in authority. For a sickening moment he wondered whether he had made a mistake.

"I hope you weren't planning to go out fishing or something," he began; but the fat man interrupted him.

"A — sight more important than that. I'm one of the prohibition-enforcement officers, and we were going to raid a still a little piece down the river."

Corrigan laughed aloud in his relief.

"By water?" he asked in apparent surprise.

"It's on the bank of the river, and the road in is almost impassable," the genial officer said. "I guess we'll have to make it by land now, though."

"Would you mind taking me to a phone in your Ford?" asked Corrigan, sitting up and attempting to dry his face with an equally soaked handkerchief.

"All right. Let's get aboard," said the leader with sudden crispness.

It was three miles to the main pike—the distillery was almost as isolated, save for a railroad spur, as Weatherby's farm—and dropped Corrigan at a wayside lunchroom where he got into telephone communication with the field and stated his predicament.

"Glad you came out all right," came Captain Flanders' laughing voice over the phone. "We'll send a car. Where are you, did you say?"

Corrigan told him, and then accepted the storekeeper's offer to escort him to his house, where he could dry his clothing.



IT WAS there that Shannon found him, two hours later, with his clothes comparatively dry and his system much inspired by sundry drinks of moonshine which had been used for medicinal purposes.

"They was sick!" Shannon whispered gleefully. "And, boy, but they are down on you like —!"

"They didn't look so tough."

"That fat bird's made a hundred thousand since he's had his job," stated Shannon. "We just got everything cleaned up when they hit. And thanks, lieutenant."

"You're welcome. Now we're square on those cops."

"With somethin' to boot. What's the camp gonna say when these birds make a report to the military police? Fall 'll tell 'em everything."

"Can't prove anything. Let 'em rave!"

"I'm gettin' out o' here, Shannon announced. "This escape showed me plenty. I got a friend manages a circus in Cuba. That's where I'm bound, right quick."

Corrigan's eyes narrowed to slits as he thought for a moment.

"There ought to be lots of *señoritas* or whatever they call the girls down there to paint, and this last little stunt will probably cause the general to lose his toupee."

"I was hopin' mebbe you'd see it that way!" Shannon burst out delightedly. "And what a time we'll have!"

The noise of a car came through the open window, and the faded wife of the kindly storekeeper entered in a moment with the announcement that the Army car had arrived.

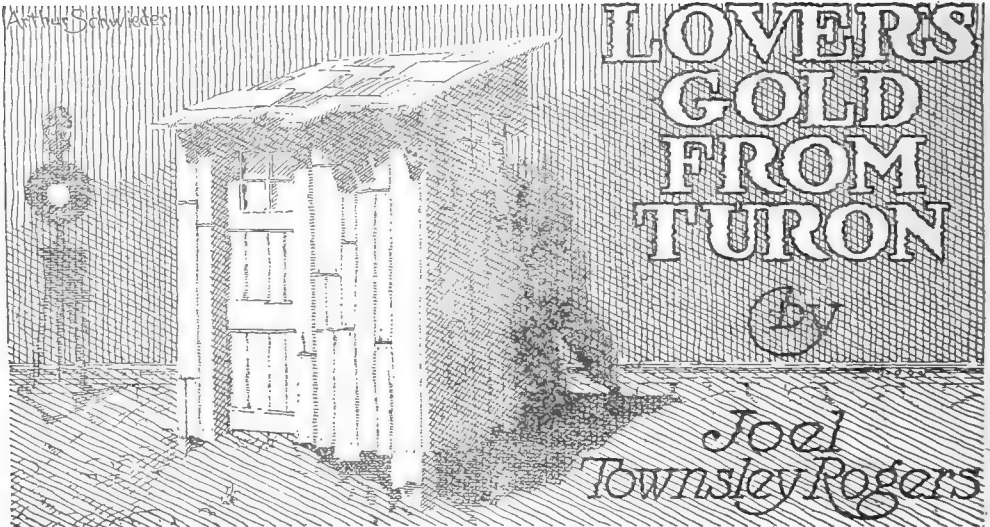
"I can get out of the Army in fifteen

days," Corrigan said as he got up. "When do you leave?"

"Right now. Meet you at the Cinco in Memphis, say—three weeks from to-day."

"Right. So long."

"So long."



Author of "Bramble-Thistles Stick."

"**A** LOVELY, lovely woman was Lillian!" screamed Old Bill. "Four of them—she gave them kisses four. And any one of them would bring her back the gold. Such strong young men, so brave and fierce! Was she not the loveliest of all in the Antipodes, you officers of police?"

Old Tom, the ragman in the shanty by the railroad tracks, had not been seen for three full days. Not by dusky twilight, not in the dim morning, did man observe his starved, gray, wild face peering into ash barrels or sulking down the alleys. He never went abroad by day, that mean, old man, for to the day his skull-like countenance was abhorrent.

His little shanty was locked and barred, and Old Bill outside. The broken shades were down. No smoke riffled from the rusty chimney. A spider spun her dusty loom beneath the crosstree of his door, and the Autumn leaves were caught in it, and soot from the railroad tracks, and foul insects. The rats ran in, ran out again, with shrill, mysterious bickering.

The trackwalkers along the right of way

caught glimpses of Old Bill, who had been Tom's familiar, dodging and prowling around the closed shanty. The two old men (other than as Tom and Bill they had no name or history) were reputed to be low among thieves, and the people who dwelt by the railroad were afraid of them, afraid of goblins, flying cats, crimson bats, toad broths, and the baneful eye. For those who dwelt in the shanties kept the old, old faith. In God they did not believe, but believed most heartily in the devil, who is a god.

"There's been murder done," the whisper went. "Something dreadful is hidden there in the shanty of Old Tom. I've heard them screaming and quarrelling over a rotten potato, I'll bet that old skunk they call Bill has had his dirty paws in this."

They spoke to the police, though that was against their creed. And the police pounced cruelly on Old Bill as he clawed and foamed about the locked door, about the broken, cobwebbed windows. They held him fast, while he squirmed like an alley cat.

"Whew!" said Sergeant Bly. "We'll

have to give him a bath right away. Look what just popped out of the garbage can!"

They ripped and ravelled away the dusty spider's web. They sundered the bars with axes, split the panels, hewed down the hinges of the door. Tumbling into the shanty of Old Tom, staring around in the murk and airless reek, they found him lying on a crazy quilt, his bed mattress and bolstered and pillowed with crude lumps of gold-gleaming quartz. His lean, cruel lips were drawn back, but they did not hunger. His wild eyes were opened, but they did not see. Three days past life, three days past death, and entered now into Heaven or the Void.

"At a glance I'd say acute malnutrition," said the quick young police doctor, Quintfil. "In other words, he's starved to death."

"And all that good yellow gold about him," said Sergeant Bly.

"But he couldn't eat it. Here, Sergeant, cover him up. God! How he looks like a skull!"

Old Bill fought in the arms of two officers who held him. "Gold!" he jabbered. "Raw gold from Turon! I knew he had it. Ah, the liar! Ah, the dirty, dirty miser!"

"Shut up, you old fool," growled Bly. "This man is dead. Speak gently of him!"

Old Bill fell towards the heaps of metal, struggling, strangling, kicking back his heels, shaking out his frail, old claws for it, burning it with the cold witch fire of his glances. They let him loose, and with the horrible softness of a cat he tiptoed over, holding a cracked bit of mirror above the lips of Old Tom.

"No breath," whispered Old Bill, in a toothless, thin tone. "He's dead. This gold is mine!"

With a scream shrill as a banshee the foul old lump of rags clawed hold of three yellow-gleaming rocks, falling over the bed, gathering the rest of that strange miser's treasure to his lean breast. A spasm came on him. The quick hands of Quintfil and Sergeant Bly dragged him back.

"Gold!" jeered Old Bill, in his whistling whine. "Gold, for her. You miser! You murderer! Ah, ha! Ha, ha! She was a lovely woman—she—she was a lovely woman, Lillian."

The Sergeant gazed hardly at Old Bill, working his jaw muscles.

"Here you, Bill! Cut out this yelling.

What do you know about this thing? You've got something on your chest."

Doctor Quintfil thought the old fellow was plain lunatic. Old Bill's hair was long and matted with ashes; his skin was as gray. There were only three hairs of wispy beard upon his chin, and the chin was compressed till it looked too near his wild old eyes. But those eyes, strangely, were quite a marvelous young blue.

"I haven't worn the badge for thirty years to be fooled now in my old age." growled Bly. "This old jailbird's got something on his mind. Out with it, Bill! Don't you stare around so dreadfully. What did you do to Old Tom here? We've got you dead to rights."

"Oh, tell me, sir, you are an officer? A young man, a handsome young man. You know a pretty woman." The old madman grasped Quintfil by the lapels and stared up into his face. "Have you known a more beautiful woman than Lillian?"

Doctor Quintfil struggled free.

"Who the devil is this Lillian, Bly?"

"Must be Spanish Lil, I reckon," surmised the sergeant. "We run her out; she must be back again. Where she's mixed up in anything, there's thievery and murder. Come on, Bill. Tell us what you and the woman did."

Old Bill fell into a spasm of laughter, which altered into coughing.

"Ah, the miser!" he yelped.

And his voice and look were not those of an old, old man, but of a featherless old crow. "Bah! you loved her, did you, Tom? Did you love to kiss her white, round throat, and put your palm upon her breast? You—you dirty dog!"

"Cut that out!" roared Bly.

He turned and spoke to young Quintfil, giggling gruffly. "Honestly, it's funny to hear that old beggar yelling about love and kisses. Bet he's a hundred and forty years old. The only thing that ever kissed him was a blackjack."

Doctor Quintfil thought of things.

"We may be like that, too, Sergeant, if we—God help us—live to be so crazy old."

"Ah, ha! Ha, ha! They said that she was loveliest, and four of them went out to dig the gold to win her. Red gold from Turon! Doane, and Merriman— Look at him, Old Tom, the ragman, the miser! You might not believe it now, but she might have had an Oxford man!"

Bly motioned to his men, and they forced the howling old bundle of human rags into a chair. He shrilled and sobbed while they stood above, about him, hard, strong young men, circling him inescapably.

"Now open your mouth, Bill, or whatever is your name. Tell us where Old Tom got all this yellow stuff, and how it was that Spanish Lil and you put an end to him. An old fellow like you—ain't you ashamed? Speak up easy now, Bill, for we've got you. We'll make it light for you.

Old Bill doubled down his neck and his lean shoulders, defying them with an obdurate shaking of his matted head.

"No, no, no!" he snarled.

His wild eyes had become crafty. The low cunning of those who have known the police often was in his attitude.

"Come on!" roared Sergeant Bly, pounding a table with his great fist. "We're not here for all evening, and the sooner you loosen up, the sooner we're through. How did you kill him? Why? Now, shoot!"

"He died—starved," gasped the old fellow. "Don't hit me! There wasn't a crust, not a green, mouldy crumb of bread."

"And all this yellow gold to sleep on? Get wise, Bill. You ain't telling fairy stories to your grandmother. You and Tom swiped this stuff from some jeweler or some fence, did you, or crooked it from some crook? Then you melted it up, hey? And this Spanish Lil got hold of you, and you strangled Tom for his share? You half-witted old mummy, you ought to 'a' had better sense! Don't you know there's a law? Where is this woman now?"

Old Bill bleated, throwing out his shaking, strengthless arms.

"Get away from me! Don't you yell at me. I'll not stand for it. Who are you to handle me like any common gutter thing? I—I—why, I have owned the gold caves of the mountains! Australia, the south seas, the Antipodes."

"It's Spanish Lil come back, for sure, Doctor," said Bly, "and she's got this old lunatic into some trouble. It'll be safe enough for him—he's too old to hang. But I'd like to get a rope around her sweet young neck!"

Old Bill mumbled and moaned, pulling his trembling chin. The sergeant rapped his brow. Quintfil nodded.

"Mad as a mackerel."

"Don't make us trouble, Bill. We'll speak to the judge for you."

"Four of them," whispered Old Bill crazily. "Four strong, young men, and there couldn't help one of them finding gold. He got it!"

Bill screamed, pointing dreadfully to the bed. His tones fell off to a patter softer than dripping rain.

"The miser—four of them. The mirror, no, it was the quicksand—no, the cave among the rocks. Give me that mirror! There's a charm upon it. It's killed a man."

The officers held him easily. Gravely Quintfil examined that cracked little mirror which Bill had picked up and held to Old Tom's lips.

"Poison, does he mean?" asked Bly. "Be careful of it, doctor."

"I don't think so. I'd swear this old fellow Tom died of sheer starvation."

Again Old Bill fought with mad fury, striving to dive his head and bite the hands which pinched him.

"It's mine, that gold! I've lived for it. I'll go in silk and satin, I'll wear a diamond ring!"

The police officers, though stern and dour fellows, split in grins. Even Quintfil smiled.

"He's a raving lunatic," growled the doctor. "But there's high sense in lunacy. See what you can get out of him, Sergeant."

"I was waiting for that word."

The police pressed against Old Bill in a dreadful ring. They pinched their paws deep into his withered old arms, and growled threats into his ears. When his head would go back they snapped it forward, and held it up when it would fall. He was made to stare, face to face, with the visage of Old Tom. The mirror was trailed across his lips; scarce a mist showed on it. Lumpy yellow nuggets were dazzled before his eyes till they popped and quickened, bright as sun on blue sea.

The police were young, and strong, and merciless, and cruel. They put their hooks to him. They had him by the neck.

"There were four of them" moaned Old Bill at last, when his lips had been uncorked.

"There was—there was Merriman, and Boothbay, and Marty May. Yes," said Old Bill. "And there was Doane."

"Marty May!" repeated Doctor Quintfil

abruptly, perking up his glance. "Is that the name you used?"

"You knew him?" asked Bly.

"I've heard of him."



"LISTEN! Listen, you young men, you striplings, you cubs—you with the slender shoulders! There were men in those days! They were giants. Listen how Boothbay died:

"She kissed those four, each one alone, swearing and crying that she loved them. One must win out—perhaps two, perhaps all. But one of the four would win. And they were all mad, because they loved Lillian.

"So they went off into the terrible hills, up the sand banks of the Turon, into the strongholds of the kings of cannibal land, singing and thinking of Lillian. It was Boothbay first. They were strong, all four as strong as trees. But Boothbay was the strongest of them all.

"In the blasted hills, up among the treeless rocks, only buzzards there, and mad dogs, and the fierce black tribes. They pushed their trail farther than white men had ever gone before, for they were young, and afraid of nothing.

"Marty May tried the rocks; Merriman washed the gravel of a brook. Doane wandered up and down, digging here and there, and finding nothing. But Boothbay went down by the Turon's sliding bank, and there he fell into the quicksand.

"There, there, hacking the sand with pick and shovel—it was Boothbay found it first—he saw the trace of gold! He tunneled deep. Rich gold was in those shifting banks, to be beaten up as a cross for the white breast of Lillian. Deep, he made the soft sand fly. Deep he bored a way into the sandy muck.

"He caught wild black fellows from the hills and made them slave for him. They propped his galleries with slabs and timbers, held up the roofs with pillars, buttressed them against the oozing walls. It was madness, for the soft sands were sinking. Yet there was gold in the sand.

"Gold in lumps—pure gold, big as a man's right fist, big as the moon. Boothbay tore it out with pick and shovel, and gathered it in a sack. About the mouth of his tunnel Doane began to watch. Doane said nothing. But sometimes his silence was like whispering.

"The black boys died by three or four like toads in the narrow tunnels. And that before a week was gone. Fever got them, or huge tumbling rocks, or the quicksands gripped them by the heel and slowly sucked them under. They couldn't die without screaming. You see, their souls were black.

"The bottom fell from underneath the feet of Boothbay just when he thought it was surest. Over the tunnel's mouth fell down a rain of sand. He leaped for the entrance, with sixty pounds of gold on his back, pulling his feet out of the sucking floor by the strength which was in him. Another man could not have done it; he not for long.

"He pulled through, leaping out into the gray day. The hungry quag would not let him go. His feet fell in a pit. There he stood and strained towards the solid rocks, with his gold sack on his shoulder. His feet could not pull free. The sand sucked about his ankles.

"He roared for Doane, who sat upon the solid rocks and watched him. But Doane did not stir. The mire was filled with eddies, and the sound it made was like a child drinking. Behind him the tunnel mouth sank inward with a sough. And now the voice of the black boys screaming suddenly was still.

"Boothbay called again for Doane. 'For God's sake, Doane!' He struggled and fought to clear his feet, till gray sweat ran down his hair. He writhed his great body, but that made the sand sink down. Three times he fought to leap clear, gathering his knees, swinging his long arms. He was a strong young man, strong as men are. I remember his cheeks were very ruddy.

"'Give me the sack, Jack Boothbay, and I'll come and get you,' said Doane.

"The quicksands bubbled, and now they had risen to the hinges of Boothbay's knees. Relentlessly Doane watched him, coldly, frozen with the lust of gold and the memory of Lillian, till the muck was seeping about Jack Boothbay's thighs. Boothbay looked grayly upon death. He was fainting, strength hardly left in him to stand upright. There was not a bottom beneath his feet save the quicksand bottom of the pit of Hell. 'Come and get me,' he cried at last. 'You win.'

"On his belly Doane wiggled out, arms

and legs spread, and took the sack on his back. He made the rocks again; but he was shivering and sick. Boothbay shook his fists and screamed. In his sickness Doane tried to giggle.

"Now Boothbay looked up at the sky and cursed, cursed God and the gold and the sand. It is said that he cursed Lillian, though it doesn't seem likely. Some hollow cave was opened beneath his feet, and he dropped feet foremost with a cry, and the sand was about his neck. He could not move his arms now, and nothing was to be seen of him but his strong head, with the eyes still glowing fiercely, the cheeks red and warm. Doane set the sack between his legs and fondled the yellow pebbles. He whispered, for he heard voices whispering to him. But they were the voices of devils.

"Boothbay opened wide his lips and began to laugh. Horribly he laughed till the sand crept up and laved his chin, and crept higher, and laved his lip. 'My love to Lillian!' he laughed. 'Now, Doane, for God's sake get me out!' The sand was in his teeth. He cursed and spat it out, rearing back his head.

"I have a little love,' he cried. His voice was faint and clotted, he did not laugh. 'A little love—a little love in Plymouth, by the sea. Her curls are brown, her name, remember—remember Jack Boothbay—'

"But now the sand was at his nostrils. He lifted back his head and struggled like a horse."



OLD Bill was giggling, cackling thinly.

"For the love," he croaked. "For the love—ha, ha!—of Lillian's kisses! That gold! That clotting sand. Well, brave men go down!"

Doctor Quintfil gripped Bill's matted hair and lifted up his face.

"You're not mad," he said. "Though who you are, I don't know. I can tell you something of your story, though it may not be as you know it."

"What do you say? You were not there?"

"No," said Quintfil wryly. "I lay in whatever limbo it is from which men's souls are born. This was, I'll bet you dollars down, seventy years ago."

"Not that long," quavered Old Bill. "Not that long, surely!"

"Time flies."

"Give me the gold!" screamed Old Bill suddenly. "Soon I'll be getting old."

Athwart the door of the shanty the spider darted downward through the air, and climbed, and crossed, spinning again in blowing space the cables of her sticky net.



FOUR of them set out from Boston Bay to dig gold in California.

Four finer boys there never were. Merriman was the son of a captain in the clipper fleet; Boothbay ran away from Harvard College; Marty May was a poet and the grandson of a president; Doane had drummed the charge in Mexico, at Monterey. Now, Doane was the wildest of the lot, and had rambled up and down, and had the thirst for women, drink and gold.

None knew where they had gone. They left all behind them, friends, soft little loves, the majesty of Beacon Street, calm fireside careers. The wind called to them.

Down against the Gulf Stream, sails catching the tropic breezes; now their pulses quickened. Eastward over the Isthmus to the Pacific, struggling up the hills on four black mules; now a golden mist lay over their glances. The sails lagged, the current paused, but now the Golden Gate lay open for them, and their souls danced with madness.

Gold, new gold, fresh torn from out the mountains, virgin as desire! This lust of gold is not the love of wealth, which calculates, and delays, and cautiously judges; nor the love of power, which seeks some end; nor the love of wisdom, which seeks some beginning. It is something which becomes more desirous than life itself, a nugget of one stone's weight heavier than the universe. It was Doane who felt that gold madness.

Now these four boys, suddenly grown men, began to look at each other with a sullen hardness. Their lips grew thin. They thought much alone.

They were late; other men had winnowed the hills before them. The harvesting was small. Peace was to be found here, visions, beauty, the idle dreams born of the sea. But, good my God! What is it youth is after?

New South Wales—the whole of the East—had gone mad with gold found by the roily Turon. Crazy tales flew over

seven thousand miles of sea. Sheep, grazing beneath the herder's eyes, had pulled up clumps of grass and laid bare ledges of shining gold. Ranchers had turned up the earth, digging water holes, and found their spades blunted against sheer rocks of adamant yellow. A clerk from Sydney, wandering in the hills alone, had fallen to sleep o'night in a cave, and awakened to find the broad morning sun striking through on stalactite and stalagmite pure as the pillars of the temples of Solomon. Why there, in the Turon, or in the Mount Alexander diggings, a man might hold out his hat to catch hailstones, and find it filled with heavy nuggets!

"They believed it," grinned Doctor Quintfil, telling the story. "They took to the sea again, heading for Australia. I think the wife of the captain of their ship urged them on, for she had acquired the gold avarice. And the rising madness of Doane affected them all. They thought they'd win the universe, the crazy young fools!"

Now the West was West, and the West was East again, but never the gold red sun they followed lay in their hands. They made Sydney, and got their packs, heading for the hills, for the farthest sources of the Turon. Each step they took, each breath, there was sung into their ears the song of gold. Men and women made the trek in an unending stream, some on horseback, some in wagons, some on foot. Some threw down their yardsticks, or cast away their pens, and started running when the news of the first strikes reached them. Running like chickens, gasping and fluttering, afraid that some one should get there first. Clerks, artisans, beggars from the gutters, rich herders, sailors, Oxford men, black sheep and white, struggled forward. But Merriman, and Boothbay, Marty May and Doane, went farthest of all, where there was none to stop them or share.

Red gold in the veins of the universe, and men mad for the heat of it. Red gold being washed in sandy flakes from the banks of rivers; red gold being torn out of rocks in molten lumps thicker than a man's thigh and weightier than a man's soul, but not half so thick and weighty as the frantic fingers which clutched for it. Here and there a hundred pounds at a time was laid bare by the searching steel, and little clowns were little kings for a little while.

And then it was Sydney, and dice, and women, and burning brandy, and a roaring voice and a liberal hand, playing the monarch for the time that the good gold lasted among the courtiers and the courtesans. And again the diggings, the gold diggings, and the mad, insensate hunt for that metal which can hire love and fame and friendship. Perchance at the last a pickax through the skull at night, and thence the dreamless sleep.

Well, it was seventy years ago, and they are all gone, lucky and unlucky prospector, gambler, murderer, crazy fool, lady of the dreadful night. They are gone, both they who dug the wealth and they who spent the wealth. And if not gone, after these weary years, it is their own hard luck.

"They found the gold!" bleated Old Bill. "Marty May got it from the streams, Boothbay from the quicksand, Merriman from the rocks. But Doane, who had loved Lillian best of all, found nothing but their leavings."

"Who is this Lillian?" asked Quintfil.

She was the wife of the captain of that ship from Frisco to Botany Bay, Old Bill told them. Doane ran off the ship with her; but once ashore in Sydney, she tried to inveigle all four of them. The bright blue eyes of Old Bill were flashing for a little while, and a smile cracked his face, as he told again the beauty of lovely, lovely Lillian.

"Four of them," he said. "There were four of them, and one of them, if love was strong enough, would come back rich to her. Boothbay died——"

"What happened to the others, Bill?" asked Doctor Quintfil curiously.

He looked at the withered old fellow with eyes shadowed by frowns. Yet the frowns were not unkind.

"We want to know how you and Old Tom there got mixed up in this, and what the —— all this has to do with today."

"Today——" began Old Bill vaguely, torn out of himself.

Quintfil saw the story would have to come as it would come. "Go on and tell us about the Turon."



"MERRIMAN dug among the rock, and struck nuggets big as heads; and out of the rushing mountain streams Marty May washed enough flaked gold to fill a bushel basket.

It was Doane alone who found nothing, for evil luck followed him. Boothbay's hoard was not enough—not the whole of the gold in the earth would have been enough, for the poison of gold had entered in him.

"They had made themselves kings and gods over the wild black men in the hills, and had each his palace of tumbled stone and thatch. The blacks groaned and fainted at the work of digging out the gold, and were rewarded with the lash. They had no love of it themselves, but they worked in the fear of death.

"Now, Doane had one black fellow who was faithful to him as black man can be to white. His name was, it may have been Ab, for that sounds easy. 'What do you want most of anything on earth, Ab?' Doane asked the black one night they were alone. 'King, more than anything else I want that hard round mirror of sunlight which shows like a god the world.' Doane knew he meant the mirror, a little round cracked mirror, which had been given him by Lillian."

Old Bill hesitated, his hand reaching out: "Give it to me! It is worth a man's life. It has looked on terrible and beautiful things."

"Give it to him, Sergeant," commanded Quintfil. "It won't do any harm."

"But there's poison."

"Oh, give it him!"

Old Bill clutched it, and kissed it, and pressed it to his withered cheek. There was no more poison in it than there is in all mirrors. Doctor Quintfil watched Bill grinning and grimacing in the bit of broken glass, and nodded secretly to himself twice or thrice.

"Merriman had hewn from the rocks enough gold to load the strongest mule down. He said good-by to Marty May and Doane at dawn of dusk one day, made a rendezvous in Sydney, and took the way over the impassable hills to Lillian. He walked alone, his gun slung to his saddlebags, switching the mule before him. For a long time Marty May and Doane could hear him singing down the hills. But the night fell, and he was hidden, and his song was silenced.

"All that night those two sat and played cards by the light of a candle. Marty May was dreadfully ill at ease, and Doane had to hug himself to keep from shivering. 'I thought I heard a dog screaming,' said

Marty May. 'No,' said Doane; 'it was nothing.' And then, 'What was that shadow across the light, Doane?' 'Oh God! Oh God!' cried Doane, and began laughing.

"It was January," said Old Bill, dreamily, "and the wattles were blooming, when one of Marty May's black boys, hunting dingo dogs over the hills to the east, on the start of the long road to Sydney, found a skull with a pickaxe cleaving it. But Marty May and his black boys didn't find Merriman's gold!

"Lillian waited in Sydney," moaned Old Bill.

Unsignificantly tears waxed in his old eyes, and he snuffled.

"She waited, that loveliest of women. And she might have had an Oxford man who once had been a gentleman. But Merriman did not come back to her, nor big Johnny Boothbay."

Sergeant Bly wrinkled up his nose.

"What happened to Doane's boy, Ab?"

"Listen," snarled Old Bill, twisting around his face and looking up. "Marty May found him one day with this broken piece of mirror, and whipped the truth out of him. When he had got it, he hung black Ab to the point of a rock, and went out with his gun to hunt Doane. He was a man now, and he knew it was Doane's life or his, for Doane was murderously mad for gold. But Doane ran to the hills and hid, burying his gold in the caves. He had seen Ab dangling in the wind, and it made him sick.

"Now, they had all four been strong young men, but Doane was the weakest of the four.

"Through the hills Marty May hunted for the man who'd been his friend. He felt the unburied bones of Merriman calling to him. And it was, I think, too because Doane now stood alone between him and Lillian. He loved her with a love as great as she was beautiful.

"Marty May had dogs with him, and black boys keener on the trail than dogs. Through the barren rocks they searched Doane out, till often, running in the night, he could feel fangs tearing at his legs, and stopped, and tore that growling throat open. It was his life or Marty May's and the gold for one, and the woman.

"One night," said Old Bill, speaking grimly, "Doane was lying asleep on a ledge of rock. There was a shallow cave below

him, which he had tried, but come out of again when he heard the dogs yelping far away. He awoke, to find the dogs ranging around the rocks beneath him, growling inside the cave, lifting up heaven with their whines. And Marty May, with his gun at his shoulder, with three black boys beside him, followed the dogs in and about. Once he looked full up at the ledge above him, but Doane was crouched behind a rock.

"Marty May let his dogs lead him into the cave," said Old Bill, in a droning voice. "Doane toppled over the rock from the top of the ledge, and closed the entrance to that cave forever more. He could hear Marty May shouting and pounding behind that living tomb, and he shouted back. But suddenly fear came over him, and he remembered the sight of Boothbay struggling in the quicksand, and heard the song of Merriman go down the hills till all song was ceased. He bent his head and ran away.

"The blacks and the dogs followed him. He was their new master. They would lick the feet of any man with a lash and the will to use it.

"Listen!" screamed Old Bill, half-throwing himself out of his chair and gazing wildly about him. "He took that gold, all of it! All that Marty May, and Merriman, and Boothbay, had torn from out the rock or river or quicksand, he gathered together and packed on ten black boys. He was richer than Australia—millions. He owned the world. He might have made Lillian a queen."

"Did he get through alive?" asked Doctor Quintfil, though not curiously.

"Alive! Alive, and alive too long through all these dirty years. In Sydney, somehow or another—his black boys may have told it—the word grew that he was very rich. He lied and denied it, for he was afraid of the gallows. He lied to Lillian, telling her he'd failed. Ah, the dirty, stinking miser! He wanted it all for himself! Hadn't he loved her? Wasn't she beautiful? Hadn't she counted on one of them to come back? He did; she was not wrong. Ah, ha! Ha, ha! The hypocritical miser!

"He'd got the poison of gold. Once he'd loved Lillian more than life, but now he loved the gold more than Lillian. He took ship and sailed away from her."

"Nice fellow!" said Bly. "Croaked his

three pals, and left the lady. What'd he do with all his money—found an orphan asylum?"

"There he is!" bleated Old Bill, pointing horribly to the bed. "He's there, the lying, lying thief! There's his gold from Turon! There's the yellow stuff he said he never had. It's mine now. Ah——"

The old fellow's cry was one of anguished exultation. He twisted up his fingers and closed his eyes.

"Ah—he couldn't cheat me of it!"

"Well, where the thunder do you come in, Old Bill?"

"I—I was the shadow which followed him on the ship. I was the memory he couldn't lose. He would have killed me, but he didn't dare; and I would have killed him, but I didn't know where he had hidden the gold. He had it with him all the time. The liar!"

"Starved to death—is that true?" asked the sergeant.

"Starved," said the doctor.

"He didn't dare to spend it!" leered Old Bill. "For half of it was mine, and he would have the whole. Years—years—how many years do you say it's been? Seventy? Seventy years he's kept it hid, and we've lived on garbage and offal. Many a night I've waked and seen his starved eyes staring at me, and known he'd have liked to kill me. But the strength went from him at the last, and I was stronger than he."

"Who the thunder are you?" repeated Bly.

"I could have killed him," said Old Bill, "if I knew where he kept it hid. I could have got away with it, for but a smile from me—a smile——"

Old Bill laid his head upon his arms and gave way to senile moaning.

Doctor Quintfil took out a cigaret and surveyed Old Bill quizzically.

"May I?" he asked. "Why, surely," said Old Bill.

The young doctor laid off his hat abruptly, and spoke.

"It happens," he said, "that Doane's boy Ab, when he was sent out with a pickaxe to kill Merriman, was afraid of the big white man, and killed one of his own black fellows instead. Merriman came on through Sydney, and back to Boston, where he died, I believe, some twenty years ago a president of a bank."

Old Bill raised his odious face and surveyed young Quintfil with those bright blue eyes.

"And Marty May," went on the doctor, "came out the rear end of the cave. You see, it wasn't a cave, but a chasm. The blacks were risen against him; and by night and day he crawled away from the Turon. It makes an exciting story as the old gentleman told it."

"You're a fool, young man," said Old Bill.

"I know what I'm talking about. Marty May, so it happens, was my mother's father's father. I wouldn't be on earth, you see, if he'd been left in Turon. I remember the long stories he told me by the Winter's fires about those fierce old days of gold!"

"That is a lie," said Old Bill clearly. "If Marty May or Merriman had lived, they would have come back to Lillian. Doane loved the gold better than he did her bright blue eyes; but they both loved Lillian. They were true young men. They were fine and strong."

"Come to think of it," said Quintfil, "as Grandfather May told his stories to me, he never mentioned a woman. It's probable that he'd forgotten her."

The police reached out their hands and grasped Old Bill again, for Old Bill had climbed out of his chair and was stretching out his claws to Doctor Quintfil.

"They loved her!" screamed Old Bill. "They loved her, for she was the most beautiful in the Antipodes, and she kissed them all, and they would bring back the gold for her! You are a liar, you young fool! I'll tear——"

"Sit down there, Bill!" roared Sergeant Bly. "You're not cleared of this thing yet. And don't you go clawing and scratching at the doctor!"

"Easy there, Sergeant," said Quintfil.

"Say; who the thunder is this old fellow?"

"Why, haven't you guessed?"

Sergeant Bly cocked his head on one side and looked.

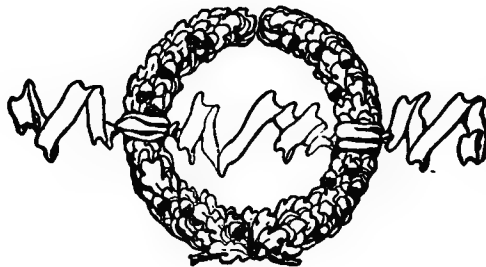
"He doesn't look like Julius Caesar, nor yet like a skeleton. But he does look like a musty old mummy, or maybe a rag-man's bag. Hey Bill! What's your real name?"

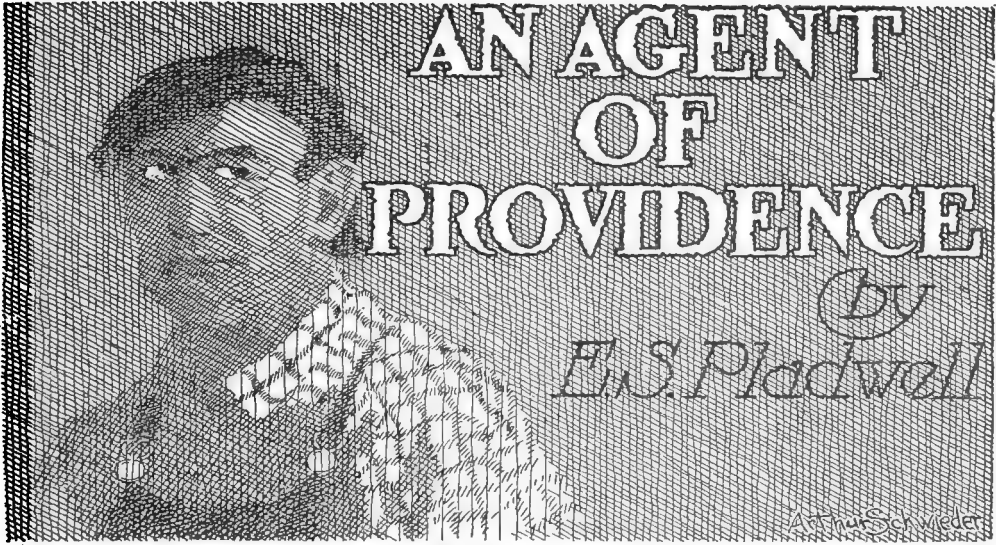
Marvelous blue were the eyes of Old Bill as they looked craftily up. Clear blue—the eyes of a man had never been so clear and blue. The police officers hesitated, coughed, stumbled back. With awkward shyness they took off their caps.

With frail woman's hand Old Bill brushed back matted hair from a brow which had once been delicately white. A delicate oval face was revealed which not age, nor hunger, nor dirt, nor covetousness had deprived of a certain coquettish loveliness, an arch beauty like that of a dusty painting.

"Once," whispered Old Bill, while the policemen bent their heads and bashfully twirled their caps, "my lovers called me Lillian!"

Dr. Quintfil was not surprised (since he had been warned by his grandfather) to find Old Tom Doane's hoarded yellow gold was nothing more than yellow pyrites, a spurious glittering base metal, fool's gold from Turon.





Author of "The Silent Captain," "Nobody Home," etc.

HE WAS shiftless, reckless, mean, morose and sullen. He was a powerful animal in checked shirt and faded overalls, with massive face, thick skull, and a low brow covered by tangled hair. When he hulked into town the sheriff observed him from a window of the county jail and telephoned the city's chief of police.

"He's dangerous!" warned the sheriff. "No good! A big, wuthless, half-breed dumb-bell from up-country. Got a temper like a skyrocket! Look out for him!"

But the somber Jim Blood at first gave no worse offense to folks than a stare from his volcanic brown eyes. Then after midnight he got into a row in a low billiard hall. Two opponents crossed him. Nobody knew what it was all about, but the struggle became ferocious.

There was a short, sharp battle which nearly wrecked the hall; and then Jim Blood's murderous temper flamed. He drew a nicked revolver.

When the smoke blew away his two opponents—cheap gamblers—writhed on the floor, dangerously wounded. Jim Blood escaped by a rear door before the police arrived. It was rumored that he was headed for the back country.

"Durn him!" exclaimed Sheriff Bill Fraser next morning irritably. "Now I've got to skallyhoot all over the desert to run down a no-count, homicidal-minded half-

breed idjut, who ain't wuth the powder to shoot him! Dog-gone!"

"Lady to see you," announced his pet deputy, poking a head through the doorway.

The grizzled, leather-necked old sheriff pulled his booted feet from his desk and turned in his swivel chair to observe a young woman standing at the threshold as if hesitating to enter. She was tall, slim, brunette, demure and neat, with brown eyes and a sensitive mouth. Obviously a well-bred girl. Sheriff Bill arose.

"Come in, ma'am. Set down. What's the trouble?"

"I am Caroline Clarke," she announced. "I came on an errand which is hard to explain."

"Go ahead, ma'am."

"It's about a ranch. The old John Blake ranch."

The sheriff registered more interest. The Blake outfit used to be the most powerful in the country. Its great Spanish hacienda-fortress still stood on a hill above the flat range like an eagle's nest, seen for miles.

"John Blake died five years ago," she continued. "His only heirs were two sisters. They had never seen him or each other for years. Soon after Blake died, Henry W. Duncan took possession of the ranch. He is a son of one of the sisters."

"Yes, ma'am. I know Duncan."

"My young brother and I are the heirs

of the other sister. We lived in Denver. A few months ago we heard of the matter and claimed our half-interest in the estate. We were given it."

"Yes, ma'am. It went through the courts. Quite reg'lar. What's the matter now?"

"Well, the ranch has gone to pieces. The income doesn't pay the running expenses. I—I'm wondering if there isn't something wrong about it all."

"How's that?"

"I don't know. Call it intuition—suspicion—anything. There's something wrong. I feel it. I've lived two months at the ranch house. I feel it!"

"You mean the ranch is bein' looted?"

"I don't know what to think."

The sheriff looked at her pityingly. After all, she was just a tenderfoot city girl with the usual feminine quirks. When things didn't go just right she wanted to accuse somebody!

"You inherited a bum piece of property," he remarked gently. "I know you're disappointed; but you shouldn't blame Duncan, your cousin. Not till you have actual proof, ma'am."

"But that great estate has almost dwindled to nothing!"

"I know. It's hard lines. The droughts of the last few years have plum ruined the ranges, ma'am. Lots of good ranches went under. Looks like Duncan did pretty well to keep the Blake ranch goin' at all."

"Do you know him?"

"Only so-so. He came here five years ago, sort of a middle-aged furniture clerk. He's handled that ranch no worse than a lot of old-time cattlemen. Looks like he deserves a lot o' credit!"

The girl arose somewhat wearily.

"Thank you. Perhaps you are right."

She gave Sheriff Bill a winsome smile.

"Perhaps I have seemed rather unjustified in coming here. Probably your viewpoint is very just. My brother and I will have to worry along as best we can."

Sheriff Bill found nothing to say, so he bowed silently like a courtly old cavalier of the by-gone Southwest, which he was. But when the girl had gone he gazed after her and tugged the gray ends of his longhorn mustache.

"Now, what in tarnation's goin' on at the Blake ranch?" he mused. "Oh, well! I've got my own troubles. I wonder which way

that fool no-count wuthless half-breed went?"

Sheriff Bill telephoned to his lookouts and constables around the county and then waited for clues. They came. Reliable informants said that the half-breed was headed into the desert to the northwest. He had been seen passing a little water-hole town.

Next morning Sheriff Bill and his pet deputy were in the saddle, well equipped with food, water, rifles and extra animals. They rode for a whole day, passed the night in the water-hole, and next day continued in quest of the half-breed, picking up his trail early. It led them into a pass that cleft a range of brown hills.

The sun grew hotter and hotter. The land became more parched. The riders turned into a little gully where their fugitive had apparently made a short cut through the hills. Suddenly they turned a big boulder and looked upon the semi-nude body of a man lying in the shade of a lone sage-bush.

Sheriff Bill dismounted and recognized him instantly.

"'Old Horntoad' Billings! A durned old hermit prospector!"

"Alive?" asked the deputy.

"I think so. No bullet wounds anyhow. No thirst either. Got two full canteens!"

Old Horntoad, clad in a pair of boots and a long white beard, showed signs of life.

"I'm a millionaire!" he gurgled.

"Sho! Well, what's your other troubles?"

"Hungry!" whispered Horntoad.

"Oh. Well, then you got rescued by the right people!"

Two hours later the old man felt better. He was a typical back-desert hermit. Travelers sometimes dig them out of the desert wastes even now. This one lived on beans, flapjacks, coffee and canned tomatoes which he earned with stray nuggets gleaned amid the lonely hills. Clothes meant nothing to him except as sun-shelters. He had forgotten such matters as clothes years ago. Meantime he dreamed of the great strike he would find "some day."

But in the quest he let his food supply run down. He was forced to hike sixty miles, sustained by one can of tomatoes. It couldn't be done!

The old man was bundled on an extra horse, and after a time the little cavalcade topped the range of yellow hills and looked

upon the great sun-blistered range, with the Blake ranch house standing on a mesa which jutted from the opposite hills. Though fifteen miles away its arched galleries and low-hung roof could be seen clearly.

"We'll put you up at the ranch," promised Sheriff Bill.

For answer the old hermit thrust a big nugget into Sheriff Bill's hand. It was a wondrous nugget, almost pure gold. The old man had held it all the time.

"It's a present," he said. "Keep it. I got plenty more."

"What? Then it wasn't delirium after all!"

"No, seh. I've found a million-dollar claim. You saved me and saved the claim. I'm rich. Anything you want's yours!"

"Then I wish you'd find me a bone-headed, no-'count homicidal half-breed!" growled Sheriff Bill. "Looks like I've got to chase him all over the map!"

"Wa-al, by chasin' him you found me, didn't ye? I reckon he done some good after all!"

"That's so," agreed Sheriff Bill. "I'll put it on his books: Debit, two tinhorn gamblers; credit, one millionaire desert rat!"



CAROLINE CLARKE was burdened with a lack of funds, a fifteen-year-old brother, a non-paying ranch and a sarcastic older cousin whose ways she did not like. Her situation was getting precarious.

Her ranch house was an enormous thing built on the side of a great mesa, a place of cool galleries, shady nooks and an air of romance. But the attractiveness was gone.

The mammoth herds of John Blake had almost vanished. There was little left except parched grazing-lands and a few half-starved cattle. The hired men were a rough lot, with one or two who alarmed her. Gradually the whole business got on her nerves.

"I can't stand it much longer!" she cried at last, throwing herself on the bed in her pretty Spanish room. "I can't! The odds are too great!"

The tall, slim, dark brother looked discomfited. His pretty sister in the trim corduroy riding-suit seemed to be going to pieces!

"Hush, sis," he comforted. "I'm here!"

"I know, Dick; but you're not big enough yet. You can't control these men."

"Can't we sell out?" asked the puzzled boy. "Somebody ought to want it!"

"Nobody does," she said wearily. "I've made inquiries."

"Where's Duncan?"

"I don't know. Away as usual. I wish he'd stay here. At least he gives some protection."

"Well, you've still got me."

"I know."

She arose wearily and started for the door.

"Stay here, Dick," she went on. "I have to see the foreman about selling some cattle. I'll be back in a moment."

She didn't like to talk with the foreman. He was a big, hulking, red-headed lout, who always grinned when she approached. His manner verged on familiarity.

"Mr. Duncan has agreed that one hundred head on the north range shall be sold," she remarked at the corral gate at the rear of the house. "How is it that they are not rounded up?"

"We ain't got the men," he responded, grinning.

"Well, get the men."

"Git the men? Where we goin' to git em? We ain't got no men to spare!"

He took a step forward.

"Look here, girlie, you ain't no hand to run a cattle range——"

"Girlie?"

"Aw, sure. Cut out the society stuff! You're too darned pretty——"

"Step back, please!"

The big fellow laughed.

"Aw, come off! Where do you think you are?"

The girl was getting seriously alarmed; but she assumed a bold front.

"On my own ranch, Gorman! Perhaps you had better get off it. I think I have seen quite enough of you."

"Oh, you have, hey? Come here!"

She struck him in the face, but his big hands grabbed her. In his breath were the heavy fumes of whisky. Now she knew where he had gained this new courage!

"Let me alone!" screamed the white-faced girl. "Let go!"

Around the corner of the hacienda came her brother, trampling on a flower-bed. In his hand was a big six-shooter. He feared to level it while his sister was in line, so he came nearer.

He came too close. The big man leaped aside, grabbed the boy and six-shooter, wrenched the revolver away and kicked him with heavy boots. The lad rolled under the corral bars.

Caroline jumped for the revolver. Frightened to desperation, she leaped forward and grabbed the butt just as the big fellow's hairy hand grasped her wrist.

"Drop that, girlie!" he commanded masterfully. "It won't do no good!"

"You'd better drop it yourself!" came a quiet masculine voice behind him.

Gorman turned. He stared into the muzzle of a hostile six-shooter held in the capable hand of the sheriff of the county.

"Jim McCree!" roared the sheriff in instant recognition. "Wanted for robbery, wife-beating and everything else! Glad to meet you again, Jim. This is luck! Why, I've had a cell waitin' for you pretty nigh two years!"

"Aw, shut up!" grunted the burly foreman.

"His name is not McCree," contradicted the startled girl. "There is some mistake. His name is Gorman."

"Oh, is it?"

Sheriff Bill disarmed the scowling man and flipped the extra six-shooter to his deputy.

"Men can change their names mighty easy, ma'am. This man's McCree. How long's he been here?"

"Months. Long before I came."

The sheriff looked at her queerly.

"You said there was somethin' crooked about this ranch. Mebbe you're right. I reckon we might as well look into it."

The pet deputy seemed disturbed.

"How about that half-breed we're supposed to be chasing?" he demanded.

"He'll wait. We'll git plenty more clues about him. He's got enemies all over the county. Let him wait!"

That night Sheriff Bill, thoroughly suspicious, examined the accounts of the ranch in a little office just off a cool, arched gallery which ran along the front of the building. He looked into the books, checked off the number of assets and estimated the morale of the employees.

"Durn it, there's not a thing wrong!" he admitted at length, as if aggrieved. "Accounts are all right, men are all right except for one crooked foreman, everything's as perfect as might be expected. Of course the

ranch doesn't amount to nothin'; but that's nobody's fault except the drought!"

The girl from Denver looked from face to face in the flickering lamplight—Sheriff Bill, the pet deputy, bearded old Horntoad with a grain-sack around his middle, and the burly foreman, whose hands were tied with ropes.

"And what of the future?" came her low-voiced query.

"I dunno, ma'am," said Sheriff Bill uncomfortably. "I reckon you better sell out if you can. Where's Duncan?"

"I don't know. He goes away quite often."

"Well, there's nothin' legally wrong. There can't be. Everything's accounted for. The men are all right except for this foreman. There's no cattle-rustlers on the range. The whole business is jest plain unfortunate for you. Hard luck. You've got a bum piece o' property."

The girl looked puzzled, but said no more. The conference broke up. The sheriff put the prisoner in a strong room, and the night passed quietly.

Next morning the sheriff, his deputy and his trussed prisoner started for the little town of Dry Lake, where they intended to leave the prisoner under guard, pick up new clues about the half-breed and sally onward on his trail. In this they were not disappointed. Questions brought answers. Paul Bozeman, owner of Dry Lake's soft-drink liquor-store, pointed the way.

"Dot half-breed, last evening on a horse he went past. Northwest. Up to der hills. In a hurry."

"Know jest where he went?"

"No; but he would go to his cousin, Mike Wolf, up under Green Mountain, no?"

"That's right," agreed Sheriff Bill. "We'll go there."

They rode all day. After a night's rest they pushed on, riding through a range of small hills that became steeper till the riders came into timbered mountains. Sheriff Bill was silent most of the way, but toward noon he spoke.

"Nice gal down at the Blake ranch," he opined.

"Sure is!" agreed the deputy heartily. "Best in the world!"

The Sheriff squinted at his subordinate.

"Looks to me like you're powerful emphatic about it."

"Well—I've got a right to be. You see, we're engaged."

"What?"

"Yes. I fell for her when she first came, but we quarreled. Fool quarrel. We got cool and huffy. But after we rescued her from that big foreman she felt different——"

"We rescued her?"

"Well, you did; but I got the credit. She was so tickled to see me that the rest was easy. We patched everything up and agreed not to quarrel any more. As soon as I get through chasing that worthless half-breed I'm going back to the ranch!"

"Wuthless half-breed?" mused Sheriff Bill. "That's funny!"

"Well, isn't he?"

"I dunno. Debit: Two tinhorn gamblers. Credit: One millionaire desert rat, one rescued gal and one captured robber posin' as a ranch foreman. All because we chased that half-breed! Mebbe we ought to give him a vote of thanks!"



A BULLET whined over their heads and snapped into a brown granite rock behind them.

"There's your half-breed," observed the deputy.

"Then we'll root him out," said Sheriff Bill grimly, forgetting his vote of thanks. "You climb around yonder hill, and I'll shinny up the other one."

It was hard, hot work. Blistering sands, sizzling rocks, a glaring sun, a steep hill, a spray of bullets combined to make the climb arduous, but Sheriff Bill finally reached the top of his hill and looked across to the sheer wall of Green Mountain, with the roof of a cabin just showing over the top of one of the cliffs. Over on a little side-hill he discerned a figure. Field-glasses proved it was Jim Blood, the homicidal half-breed.

Then ensued a battle among the hot rocks. It was a desperate game of hide-and-seek with death to the loser. Often the sheriff and his deputy and the half-breed shifted positions. Once they got closer. But the half-breed retreated to another position in the rear.

"Dog-gone the stubborn, no-'count idjut!" grunted the sheriff regretfully. "He ain't got sense enough to surrender. Nothin' to do but kill him!"

But the slaughter was deferred. That night the half-breed slipped away, and next morning the sheriff and his deputy entered a tenantless cabin. Hoof-prints showed that the fugitive had traveled to the northwest.

"Now we'll follow some more," said Sheriff Bill.

"But we're getting out of the county!" demurred his deputy.

"Can't help that. We can't stop now. Got to travel while the trail's fresh."

They followed. The sheriff's blood was up. They followed over plains, prairies, hills and mountains. They followed through small towns and cattle-ranges. They followed till their faces were haggard and their eyes bleared from sun and sand and dust.

Sometimes the trail of the fugitive was dim, and they had to pick up news at towns or ranch-houses. Sometimes the trail was fresh and brought battle.

Once on a dazzling yellow sand-flat they almost had their man. It was a stand-up fight with rifles at long distance, without the slightest patch of vegetation to offer cover for man or beast. But the range was too far, and the half-breed got away, making for mountains which stood in the distance like hazy purple ramparts.

The sheriff was far out of his county. In fact he had crossed another one and was in a third. But he didn't dare to drop pursuit and summon official help. He was too close on the trail.

He chased the half-breed into the mountains and across them. There was a fight at a tumbling spring in a great cañon where the tired fugitive tried to rest, keeping his horse hidden among bushes.

In this battle a bullet from the half-breed's rifle tore away the pet deputy's little finger; but Sheriff Bill blazed away and apparently got results. The half-breed disappeared into the bushes. A moment later he streaked out of his retreat like a scared rabbit and spurred his tired horse down the cañon. He swayed in the saddle.

"Hit!" grunted the sheriff. "Why doesn't he quit, the stubborn durned fool! Now we've got to chase him till he drops!"

The sheriff and his deputy followed through a timber country, with the trail of the fugitive ever before them. They pursued warily for a few more miles and descended into a new Eden that gladdened their weary eyes.

It was a beautiful land of meadows, trees, roads, streams and farm-houses, with just a few wooded hills to make it picturesque. Around the farm-houses were gardens, fences, orchards and barns. Beyond all

these was a flat grazing-range with a river running through it—a verdant range spotted by thousands of sleek cattle clear to the faraway sky-line.

"Paradise!" grunted Sheriff Bill. "I never seen this country before. There goes that fool half-breed. See? He's gittin' on that road! Durn him, I hope he breaks his neck!"

But the fugitive didn't. The sheriff and his deputy gained the road and then hurried along past a cluster of houses and a tiny town with a church. They reached the river and crossed it on a stout bridge.

They began to overhaul their man. The road curved around the nose of a timbered hill, and they caught sight of him again on a straight tangent. He was nearing a grove of trees. Within the trees apparently was a home of some kind.

Suddenly the half-breed turned into a lane which seemed to lead to the ranch-house.

'He's sick!' shouted the sheriff. 'That bullet got him! Mebbe this is the end of the trail!'

Sheriff Bill and his deputy flogged their jaded horses. They galloped up to the lane and turned in. Before their eyes was a small but pleasant ranch-house with a garden in front of it and many barns and corrals in the rear. Palpably the headquarters of a prosperous outfit!

In front of the house Sheriff Bill noticed four men. One was the sullen half-breed with hands up. The others held weapons. The leader of these, a man in plain store clothes, was speaking to the half-breed in a strident voice:

"Get off my ranch! What do you mean by pointing a rifle at me and telling me to hide you? Who are you? What's the matter with you? Who are you running from?"

"He's runnin' from me!" yelled Sheriff Bill, riding up and dismounting. "The Sheriff of Empire County!"

"Oh!"

The man looked up, and Sheriff Bill found himself gazing into the shrewd, lined face and gray eyes of Henry W. Duncan, half-owner of the old Blake ranch in faraway Empire County!

If Duncan was electrified, so was Sheriff Bill; but he recovered his composure first.

"What in thunder are you doin' here?" he demanded.

Duncan's face turned pale, and he un-

consciously lifted a six-shooter in his hand; but he was too sensible to resent Sheriff Bill's presence in this fashion, and he put the thing away. Then he looked at his men. Clearly this was no place to talk with the sheriff, so he gathered himself and replied in a conversational manner:

"I'll tell you all about it later in the house. Do you want this half-breed? If so, take him!"

The sheriff took him. The half-breed's shoulder-wound was bound and he was properly trussed up, not without explosive language on both sides.

Then Sheriff Bill sought Duncan. He was vaguely suspicious about Duncan and didn't know what to make of it all; but Duncan was quiet enough and faced him across the oilcloth-covered table in the dining-room.

"Well?" snapped Sheriff Bill, slapping his broad hat on the table. "What's it all about?"

Duncan seemed reluctant to speak.

"It's a long story, sheriff."

"Mebbe. Well, I'll hear it. I'm gittin' plum curious. Jest now I learned you're goin' under the name of Armstrong in this country. This here's the Armstrong ranch. Run by Henry W. Armstrong. How come?"

Henry W. Duncan licked his lips. He acted like a man in a trap. But apparently there was no way out except by frankness.

"You remember the big drought four years ago?" asked Duncan.

"Yep."

"You know how the cattle died off on the old Empire range?"

"Yep."

"Well, I tried to save some. I carried a herd over to this county and bought a small holding. Later I bought more land. The herd prospered over here. Those on the Empire range didn't."

"That looks reasonable."

"This ranch grew. The old one shrank."

"Yep."

"That's all. I'm a business man, Mr. Sheriff. I saved what I could from the wreck."

'All very proper. But you knew there was other owners of the Blake ranch beside yourself, didn't you?"

"N-not then."

"You suspected there'd be some, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes; I suspected; nothing more."

"Yep. And so you fixed up a nice place here for yourself! You took the cream and left 'em the skimmings!"

"I saved the cattle!" snapped Duncan with some heat. "Am I not entitled to what I saved?"

"Yep. You are. But how about their disappearance from the old range? How about the Blake ranch money that you used to buy this ranch? Didn't you tell the courts that these here cattle had died of drought? You did! You darned crook, you falsified the Blake ranch books so's to hornswoggle the other heirs and git everything for yourself!"

"Crook?"

Duncan stood up.

"That's going a little too far, Mr. Sheriff!" he warned.

"Yes, crook!" roared Sheriff Bill. "Set down! Quit tryin' to sidestep! If your transactions were so darned honest, how come that you changed your name to Armstrong over here?"

Duncan looked wilted. Sheriff Bill's temper subsided, and a quizzical grin spread over his face.

"I see it all now," he remarked. "You're about the queerest maverick in three counties. You're a business man; you've got a fine brain; you've built up one of the finest ranches I ever saw; but you jest couldn't help wantin' to hog everything, and you went too far. You've stolen cattle and falsified books.

"On the other hand, you've helped to build a fine new Arizona empire over here. I'm darned if I know what to do about you."

"Forget it!" suggested Duncan eagerly.

Sheriff Bill's gray eyes bored through him.

"There's the crook speakin' again," he observed tiredly. "I reckon it's incurable. That little gal over in Empire county's goin' to have a hard time with you; but that's none of my business. It's my business to see that she gits her rights. She'll have 'em.

Half of this ranch belongs to her, jest as half the old Empire belongs to her."

"But I built this ranch!" protested Duncan. "It's my work—every part of it!"

"Tell that to the courts," suggested Sheriff Bill. "I'll lug you over to Empire County, and we'll have a nice public hearin' with newspaper reports and everything."

"No!"

"All right. Give over half your ranch to the gal that's entitled to it. Make out a deed of gift quietly before your county recorder."

Duncan looked into Sheriff Bill's eyes for a long time; but he knew there was no other way out.

"All right," he agreed in surrender. "Have it your way."



THAT night Sheriff Bill and his deputy brought dinner to the sullen half-breed, who snarled at them like a trapped animal.

"You're about the meanest specimen I ever saw!" observed the deputy, looking down on the bound figure on a cot. "No manners, no decency, no kindness, no brains—nothing!"

"Wrugh!" gritted the burly half-breed. "—————!"

"Oh, shut up, you pore dumb-bell," said Sheriff Bill sadly. "Look here. I'm goin' to see if the courts won't go easy with you. Mebbe you deserve it."

The half-breed stared.

"Yes," continued Sheriff Bill, "you're an agent of Providence, you pore, no-'count, or'nary bonehead! In the first place, you shot up two cheap gamblers that oughta been shot up. Then you rescued a starvin' miner, saved a beautiful gal from a villain, captured a robber, united two lovin' hearts and restored half of a ranch to its rightful owner! You'll go to jail for a while; but you ought to git a medal!"

And the moody half-breed glared, wondering what it was all about.



GHOST LANTERNS

by
Alan
B.
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Author of "Hullabaloo," "The Brass Dolphin," etc.

THERE were seven of us aboard the schooner *Terrapin* when she sailed north from Maranhão. There were still seven of us the third day up, when we were becalmed somewhere out of sight of the Brazil coast. But during the next three nights, four men disappeared.

We were lying in the flat calm of the doldrums when it happened. A flat, glistening sea, like hot, blue steel; a blazing sky, so glaring that it threatens to put out your eyes; hot, heavy air, that presses against you and bears you down; motionless sails, an idly drifting ship, a steamy smell of tar—that is the doldrums by day. By night the biggest thing is the silence.

Somehow, the doldrums seem worse on a little ship; and the two-masted schooner *Terrapin*, beating up and down in the catch-as-catch-can cocoa-trade; was little, very little. Perhaps it is the sense of confinement on a little, becalmed ship that makes a man want to get off and walk; or perhaps it is the dullness of a small crew. Nothing happens to break the stifling monotony. Or, if things do happen, as they did on the *Terrapin*, they are such that you never want to see them happen again.

Of the seven of us Cap Dorkin was the hardest boiled. He was a short, square-built man of indeterminate age, with the fishy kind of eyes that show the whites below the irises. Three of his four-man crew

were similar—of the surly type of seamen. Jimmy, the cook, was of the other type, round-faced and merry. I was the fourth man of the crew, and was supposed to be mate, which meant that I slept in the cabin instead of the forecabin.

There was one other, a passenger named Harris; he was probably the only passenger the *Terrapin* ever had, a roughly dressed man with a fat, smooth face. And these were the seven of us that started the voyage from Maranhão to Santiago.

We were becalmed late in the afternoon of the third day up from Maranhão after two days of sluggish progress; sunset found us weltering under sails that caught not the slightest breath of air. The night was heavy and still, and not until morning did any one suspect the thing that happened in the dark.

Dorkin was the first to notice something wrong when we woke for breakfast.

"I don't smell no coffee," was the first thing he said. "Shake a hoof forward and see why that fat slob of a cook ain't cookin'."

There was no one in the galley, and the stove was cold. Nor was the cook in the forecabin, nor about the deck. Joe Bates and Sharky Steve were stretched out near the capstan, lounging drowsily.

"Where's Jimmy?" I sung out. "And why ain't he slinging the rat-killer?"

Joe and Sharky looked blank.

"Guess the old man must have him aft,"

Joe offered. "Don't we eat no more?" "If Jimmy don't come forward a-hopping," Sharky added, "I figure to up with a mast and knock down that there cabin. I've eat every now and then for forty years, and I figure to keep right on."

"Well, he ain't aft," said I.

They sat up, at that. I turned to go aft, but paused with an afterthought.

"Where's Bill Grimes?" I asked.

"Ain't he aft neither?" asked Joe.

"There's somethin' pequiliar goin' on here," decided Sharky Steve, getting to his feet, "and I figure to know what it is. Bill ain't been forward all night."

"Naturally not," said I; "it was his watch."

"That don't account for it," said he, and I turned and went aft, the two seamen at my heels.

Cap Dorkin took the news of the disappearance without a word. He squirted tobacco over the rail and set about to search the ship, the rest of us following along, and Harris, the passenger, trailing after and looking blank. We found nothing. That is, nothing but one thing.

Hitched to the taffrail, and trailing in the water astern, was a half-inch line that had been coiled on the deck when last noticed. Cap Dorkin snatched at the line and hauled it in; but there was nothing on the end of it, and we knew less than we did before.

The men were gone.

"Maybe they gets in a fight and falls overboard," suggested Joe Bates. "And drowns, locked in each other's arms, as y' might say."

"All without makin' a sound, I suppose," sneered Sharky Steve.

"Maybe they falls down a hatch and busts a leg," Joe advanced. "An' can't yell, bein' knocked cold as a herring."

"Followin' which the rats eat 'em, leavin' no trace," Sharky supplied. "Can't you think up no more o' them good ideas?"

"Get forward," ordered the captain, and they went.

That day we lived miserably, sweltering under a melting sun, and eating little of the stuff that Sharky Steve scraped together in the galley. Forward and aft there had come over us that stolid uneasiness that falls upon men in the presence of circumstances unnatural and unexplained.

Cap Dorkin was especially silent and stubborn. Harris asked permission to search

the ship again, and got it; but he found nothing more. After his own special search Harris was disposed to discuss the affair with Dorkin; but the captain was short of speech.

"Well," Harris would start up again, "what *could* have happened to them?"

"I dunno," Cap Dorkin would reply.

"Did you ever hear of anything like this before?"

"Like what?"

"Like these two men disappearing, this way?"

"I dunno." From the captain no further opinion was to be drawn.

Up forward there was a different sort of talk going on between Joe Bates and Sharky Steve.

"These here is bad waters at best," commented Joe. "I've heared of queer things goin' on in these seas before now."

"Specially on sailin' vessels," said Sharky.

"Ycah," agreed Joe.

"Take that there brig, now, the *Rantoul*. She that was found aground on the Carragda Beach, with all sail set, an' not a hand aboard."

"What's the rest of it?" asked Joe.

"There ain't no more," said Sharky. "Her cargo was all there, just as it was stowed. But no hide nor hair of captain or crew heard of from that day to this. It's goin' on two years now."

"Real queer," admitted Joe, swearing, "but no queerer than the case o' Crazy Jim Clancy. Jim, he shipped on the *Pelican*, that there old brigantine. The *Pelican*, she sails out and don't never put into port again. Jim, they picks him up drifting in a longboat. When they asks him what happened he says nothin' didn't happen, only all hands disappeared off the ship, one by one—so he got scared and left in the boat. But the *Pelican*, she ain't been heard of since. Some say Jim's crazy," Joe added, "an' some say he ain't."

"There's queer things goes on in these seas," Sharky repeated.

"There's queer things goin' on on *this* vessel," said Joe.

And so it went. To these yarns I paid little attention, for I was familiar with their like; but Harris, when he wandered forward, drank them in silently.

As night closed down a faint breeze fluttered the sails for a bit; but presently it died,

and the night again became silent, clear, breathless. Cap Dorkin moved Joe and Sharky aft for the night. It was the first sign he had given of recognition that, aside from a peculiar accident, anything was wrong on the *Terrapin*.

No one slept before the dog-watch, which was Joe's.

 I WAS wakened by a sudden outcry from Sharky, and in an instant I was on deck, the captain at my heels. Through the starlit dimness of the tropic night I could see Sharky leaning over the taffrail, peering down into the black water astern.

"What's wrong—what's wrong?"

"Joe! Joe's gone!" Sharky answered.

Cap Dorkin shouldered past me. "Did you see what happened?" he demanded.

"I didn't see nothin'," Sharky whimpered. "I woke up feelin' somethin' was wrong. Too quiet like. I come on deck, and Joe was missin'!"

"Nothing?" Dorkin demanded again, thrusting his head forward with dog-like menace.

"Nothin', I swear! 'Ceptin' this here." He indicated the taffrail.

Tied to the taffrail with a couple of loose-thrown bights, as if bent by a man in great haste, was that same length of line, trailing in the sea as before. I hauled it in, waking phosphorescent sparks in the dark waters below; there was nothing on its end.

"Put up your hands—all of you!" came the captain's voice, low and hard. We turned to face a heavy automatic.

For the next few minutes I thought that Sharky, Harris and I were about to meet the mysterious end that had overtaken Joe and Bill Grimes and Jimmy the cook. I was convinced that a strange insanity had deranged the mind of Cap Dorkin, inciting him to uncanny and purposeless murder.

In single file, covered by the automatic, we were marched down the short ladder into the cabin. Once in the lantern-light Dorkin made us stand against the bunks while he minutely scrutinized the faces of each of us in turn. Then, after some moments of this, he stepped back. A baffled look was in the captain's face as he put away the gun.

"No," he said, "none of you done it. None of you done it. I'd know if you did. But you didn't."

There was no more sleep that night. We sat in the cabin smoking and speculating gravely. Sharky Steve spun a wild yarn about a giant octopus that once came up from unknown depths to fasten itself upon the bottom of a becalmed schooner. Three men, he said, were dragged over the side in two nights by the monster. So huge was this sea-horror that when it shifted its hold upon the bottom the ship listed. It was this slight listing of the ship in dead calm that led to the monster's discovery.

"Be still a minute!" said Harris. "Didn't the deck tilt a little bit just then?"

We sat silently looking at each other for a few moments, every nerve alert to discern a barely perceptible shifting of the hull. So greatly had my nerves been affected that for an instant I actually thought that the little *Terrapin* was listing, ever so slightly.

"There!" said Harris again. "Didn't she tip just a little then?"

"I—I dunno whether she did or not," Sharky Steve admitted.

"She did not list," said Dorkin decisively, and we accepted his judgment.

Sharky told other yarns, of strange unexplained disappearances, such as we just had seen; of weird sea-curses that followed ships to their dooms; of monsters unknown to men. He thought that some evil and mysterious fate was pursuing the *Terrapin*, taking her sailors one by one with the intention of at last taking her. Any other time, we would have laughed.

Dawn came at last, bringing another blazing day.

The next night was the third night of the calm. It was also the last night, had we but known. The four of us did not attempt to sleep, but sat upright in the lantern-light of the cabin. How I happened to doze at last I do not know; but I remember that Harris was dozing before me.

When I woke, at the sound of feet upon the deck, Sharky Steve was gone.

The circumstances were the same as before. The same line trailed from the taffrail, without other clue. As Harris and Cap Dorkin and I looked at each other, each knew the other's thoughts. Who would be the next to go? We had given up asking how.

If only we could have wind! Just a capful of air—Sharky Steve was gone—



IT WAS morning. A breeze was coming up, very gently, and the *Terrapin* was beginning to forge ahead, very slowly and stodgily. Then Cap Dorkin sighted a sail.

It was evident to me that we had somehow got far out of our course, for in three days we had not sighted more than the distant smoke of a vessel of any sort. But now, plainly enough, a schooner had come into sight, a ship of about our own tonnage, headed our way.

Why Cap Dorkin wanted to take in all sail and put out the sea-anchor until the other vessel should come up I did not understand, but that is what we did. The breeze that early morning had promised did not increase, and all day long we lay waiting while the approaching vessel worked her way toward us. Slowly she drew nearer hour by hour; and at evening she answered our signal and lay to.

Captain Graves, of the *Molly Bruce*, wore a face totally without expression, but his gray eyes were keen. The two captains greeted each other coolly as we three from the *Terrapin* came aboard.

"I need men," explained Dorkin briefly when we were in the cabin of the *Molly Bruce*. "What can you spare?"

"Not a man," answered Graves. "I'm short-handed myself."

"All right," said Dorkin. "Will you take a passenger?"

"No," answered Graves. "I never take passengers."

"But I can pay!" Harris broke in. "I can pay well!"

"I'm not interested," said Graves again.

"Look here," cried Harris. "You don't understand me. I tell you, I can pay almost anything!"

Slowly Graves turned and surveyed the other man. The captain's face was still as a mask, but his eyes were hard as steel.

"I know you can," he said.

Harris appeared taken aback, and several moments of silence followed. "Then make me a proposition," he presently suggested.

"You know that I know who you are," said Graves, "and yet you want a proposition from me?"

Harris hesitated.

"Yes," he answered.

"Your name is Singleton," said Captain Graves. "You are probably under another name just now because you had to ship out

of Maranhão on either the *Terrapin* or the *Molly Bruce*—or else lay over in Maranhão waiting for one of your own ships. You wouldn't dare ship under your own name because your business methods and the ships you inherited from your father have killed the little-vessel trade in the small ports. You went out to get us, and you've done well at it. Yet you want a proposition from me?"

"Yes," said Harris again, his voice cold.

Graves got out a pen and wrote for several moments, then handed the paper to the *Terrapin's* passenger.

"Will you sign that?" he asked.

Harris' face flushed as he read the sheet.

"I'll see you in — first!" he flashed.

Cap Dorkin had been staring gloomily through the porthole at the *Terrapin* lying deserted fifty yards away in the thick gloom.

"My sidelights are out," he remarked.

"I've got to be getting back."

Then suddenly an oath burst from him.

"Step here," he said, his voice low, "and see do you see what I see!"

I peered out of the porthole and saw nothing, save the *Terrapin*, floating lightless under bare poles in the twilight.

"What was it?"

"Lanterns! They're gone now. Nol There they are again! Look!"

He sprang up the ladder. Yes, I saw the lanterns, two of them, moving rapidly and with a peculiar smoothness along the little schooner's starboard rail. Then they disappeared, as quickly as if quenched in a bucket.

Cap Dorkin's hail roared from above. "Ahoy! The *Terrapin*, Ahoy! Answer, — you!"

There was no answer; except that I saw the two lanterns appear again at the forward rail of the *Terrapin*, and slide aft with that same strangely smooth movement. It was enough to send the shivers along any man's spine. I thought, "Ghost lanterns, Sharky Steve would have called them."

"Kind of funny," commented Graves, "that there's no answer from your crew."

Harris was beside me, staring through the port. In the young light of the cabin-lantern his face was white as surf.

"The crew?" he said in a strange voice.

"There— isn't any—crew."

Silence held while Harris and I stared across the still water at the *Terrapin*, lying lonely and deserted.

"Your captain wants to leave," said Graves. "You'd better stand by to go back to your ship."

"Go back? Go back to the *Terrapin*?"

Captain Graves' voice was like a saw on steel. "You are going back now," he stated, "unless—you like my proposition!"

"I can't go back there!" cried Harris.

"Then sign!" Graves shoved the paper toward him.

"It's unreasonable—impossible——"

"Sign!"

"I can't——"

"Then get back to your ship!"

Harris wavered, squinting through the port. "Ahoy! Ahoy, the *Terrapin*!" boomed Dorkin's voice above, in a long wailing hail. But the ghost lanterns appeared no more. Unmanned and silent, the little ship looked even more hopeless than when those weird lights had slid along her rail.

"For the last time, sign or go!"

"I'll sign," said Harris, at last.

He signed, and sat down weakly upon a locker. I witnessed the signature, then followed the captain up the ladder. Then, as the two skippers met, once more a peculiar thing happened. The two men gripped each other's hands and shook heartily.

"All O. K., Bob?" asked Cap Dorkin.

"All set," answered Graves. "'Good boy, Sam!'"

I rowed Dorkin slowly back to the *Terrapin*.

"Eight years," said Cap, "eight years we've bucked that yellow-backed ship owner. Eight years of fighting upwind and losing. And now we've got him! That paper he signed turns the tables in the small-port trade! We've got him at last!"

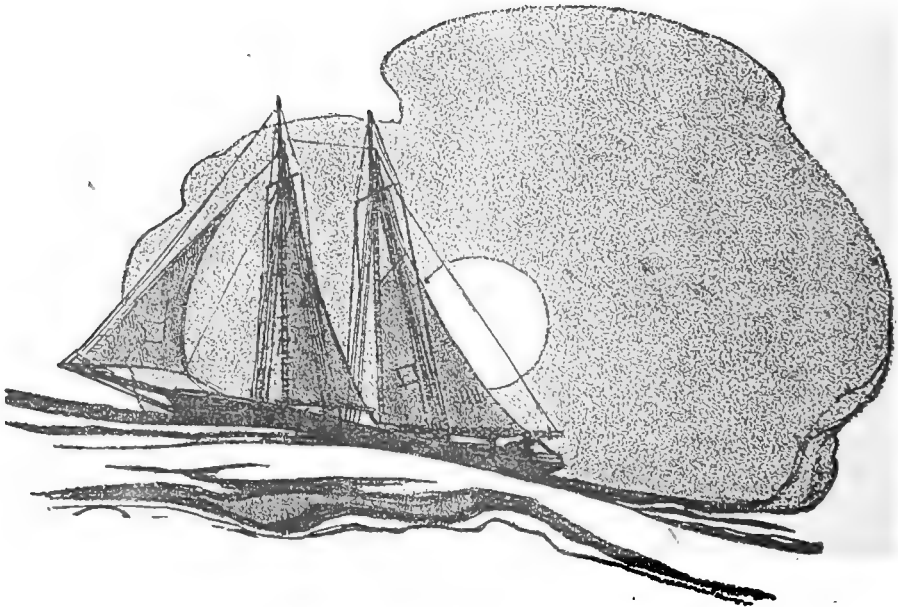
"But what about——" I began.

"All that show? All for him! Why do you suppose I got clear off our course? Why do you suppose the *Molly Bruce* came up just at the right time? It was all planned out, you fool! I didn't tip you off because you're too young—you couldn't have faked it right. The boys had a terrible time stowed away in the hold, though. Hot and stuffy like. I'll sure have to make it up to them!"

Jimmy the cook, and Bill Grimes, and Sharky Steve were playing poker in the cabin when we boarded the *Terrapin* again. And Joe Bates was complaining that he had burned his thumb on a "ghost lantern."

"It was a phony idee anyway," he growled. "Why not stick a gun to the mucker's head in the first place, and be done with it?"

But some of these old-timers do things in odd ways!



TAMELESS DAYS

A Four Part Story
Part Three
By Hugh
Pendexter

Author of "War Wampus," "Over the Rim of the Ridge," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THE Contents, that is, Milot Content, his fifteen-year-old daughter, Josette, and his son, Beach—were preparing to leave their farm in Madison Valley. The father's rheumatism made it necessary for him to reach Salt Lake City before the Winter set in. This was in 1863, and their route would take them through the gold town of Virginia City.

With the arrival of Ned Williamson, an old mountain-man, the party set out with a large freight-wagon load of vegetables. Josette and her father planned to go on to Salt Lake City, leaving Beach to find work near Virginia City. Williamson and the boy rode ahead, discussing the opportunities there.

Plummer, the sheriff, according to Williamson, was in league with the "road-agents," whose crimes were increasing in boldness and frequency. In an encounter with two horsemen Beach made an enemy of the "Wild Cat" in drawing his gun on him.

At Virginia City the vegetables and outfit were sold for sixteen hundred dollars in paper money to Carlton, the hotelkeeper. Two hundred dollars was left with him for Beach, Williamson taking the rest of the money and arranging to meet Content senior and his daughter at Snake Ferry, *en route* to Salt Lake City, to avoid the loss of the money in the hold-up of the stage-coach, which was almost certain to take place.

On the night that Williamson left, "Gold Dick," a miner, was robbed and killed. Plummer, the sheriff, charged Williamson with the murder and a posse was sent after him.

Beach was engaged to work for a lumber-mill owner named Holter and was sent by him to Bannack to purchase a belt for the mill machinery. On the way he met George Ives, whom he had been told was implicated in many crimes with which

Plummer's name was also linked. Ives professed friendship for Beach.

BEACH reached Bannack City the next morning.

He made a friend of Griscom, the express agent, and sought his advice. The agent warned him to be on his guard against the road-agents, also expressing his distrust of Plummer. Finding Jesson, the man from whom he was to purchase the belting, Beach was unable to buy it even after offering six hundred dollars in gold.

An attempt by one of the gang of thieves, named Baldy, to bully Beach into giving up his horse on the ground that it had been stolen was frustrated by Sessions, the Bannack minister. Baldy, however, left the field with ominous threats against the youth.

On the agent's advice Beach decided to leave for Virginia City that night instead of the next morning. On the return trip he heard two horsemen in pursuit of him and withdrew until they had passed. He went to sleep in a grove near the road, to waken in the morning and discover Baldy sitting by his horse, with the bags of gold at his feet and a gun in his hand. By a ruse Beach managed to blow Baldy's head off.

Proceeding to Virginia City, Beach met Ives, telling him that he had been robbed by Baldy, as he knew Ives had been with Baldy pursuing him the previous night.

He reached the town and returned the money to Holter, telling him, Beidler and Carlton that he shot Baldy. They warned him that Plummer had been informed of Baldy's death and that the sheriff would probably close his eyes to a plot by the Wild Cat to shoot Beach on the pretext that he was avenging Baldy's death. The lad was then sent to the mill for safety.

On the third day a party of six men surrounded

the mill and the cabin. Beach killed the Wild Cat and wounded another man with his rifle, and drove the rest of them out of the cañon. The next morn-

ing a mountain-man, "Old Misery," came to the cabin and, being a friend of Ned Williamson's, was accepted as a friend by Content.

CHAPTER VII

BEACH LEAVES THE GULCH

OLD MISERY proved to be a diverting companion. He confessed to years "rising seventy-six," but insisted his exact age was a matter of speculation owing to the sameness of the flowing years. Beach might have accepted this to mean a monotonous round of months, with nothing to distinguish one year from another, had not the old man garrulously indulged in reminiscences.

Then it seemed to the willing listener that each day had been filled with narrow escapes from red men or from the destructive forces of nature. In speaking of any particular event he was apt to designate the time of it after the Sioux calendar system of "Winter counts."

Of all that had happened east of the Mississippi he had a vague knowledge. He was born in New York State, but his people had moved to the Ohio country when he was very young, and thenceforth the East knew him no more.

He did know a "mighty big fight was on" between the Northern and Southern States, and his sympathies were with the South on the grounds that a commonwealth, like an individual, should be allowed to do as it pleased. Beyond that general bias the Civil War was far in the background of his thoughts, and as impersonal to him as if it were being fought on foreign soil.

Like Williamson he had no desire to hunt for gold, as his wants were few and easily supplied by rifle and traps. He had trapped a season with Carson and claimed to have been present at the fight in Pierre's Hole, and before that to have participated in the Aricara campaign of 1823, the first ever conducted by the United States Army against the Indians west of the Mississippi. Delving even deeper into the past, he represented himself as being present and participating in the war between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1816 when many lives were lost. But even behind that remote time did his keen memory run, and he held Beach

spellbound by casually narrating events contemporaneous with the birth of the American Fur Company in 1808, when John Jacob Astor secured his charter and called his Pacific coast venture the Pacific Fur Company.

He spoke of the 1812 War, when the North West Company descended on the Columbia and forced Astor to sell out, as if it were an event of yesterday.

Some of his personal history was subject to grave doubts in Beach's mind, as in order to be an actor in stirring dramas, closely related as to time, he made astounding geographical jumps. But that he intimately knew men who had participated in various pivotal affairs of the far-away days was not to be doubted.

For the greater part of the first day he talked almost unceasingly, pouring out a strange jumble of vivid narrative, and quietly dismissing the most amazing climaxes as being something found in the routine of life. He was perfectly willing to lie on his blankets on the floor and allow Beach to do all the work and wait upon him. He was frank to criticize the coffee for having "no jump" to it and was inordinately fond of sugar, which was very scarce and precious.

After the first day Beach estimated him to be a lovable old liar who had led a life of continuous struggle with savages and relentless nature; a man who knew the country from the forks of the Missouri to the valley of the Willamette as a man learns to know a narrow gulch. He carried no belt arms except a long butcher-knife, and made some target shots with his old muzzle-loading Hawkins that proved his deadly marksmanship. He was much interested in Beach's hand guns and examined them critically, but explained:

"Don't need 'em in my business. When I git close enough to use one of them poppers it's high time for 'Old Reliable' to git into the fight."

And he tapped his knife.

"Nothing like cold steel when you git to grips with a man," he continued. "Makes you feel that you've always knowed him real well. Makes you cur'ous to know how he's made inside, and a hunk of lead don't tell you nothing."

Beach shuddered, but Old Misery's faded eyes were quite gentle while he was saying it.

"If those Blackfeet swung back this way hadn't we better go looking for them?" asked Beach, after they had finished their midday meal.

Old Misery shook his head.

"Only a handful of them. Just scouting around. They won't do much harm. Only a sculp or two if they stumble upon some fool miners working apart from a camp. Rest of the boys will prob'ly cut their trail when they swing back from Crow Crick to Virginny City. If they do they'll scare them back up north."

"They'll think you've been killed when you don't show up in town."

"Prob'ly. What's that book? Let's hear it talk."

Beach picked up the mutilated volume and began reading. At first Old Misery was captious and repeatedly interrupted and demanded an interpreter, saying it sounded like Choctaw. But as Beach ignored him and worked deeper into the story the old man caught the theme and his pipe went out as he listened.

When Beach finished his stint Old Misery stared at him in silence for a few minutes, and then said:

"The old man wa'n't no good. Born wrong. Thinks all — of hisself. Oughter be in a wagon-train surrounded by reds so's he can git a meek and humble natur'. Hope the younker grows up and does something to make him stand on his hind legs and snort."

"The little gal seems to have the makings of a likely woman, but she didn't oughter stand round like a Digger squaw every time the old buck hoots. I'd 'a' liked to 'a' had that old cuss with his shiny store boots down round the Three Tetons about forty years ago. He'd 'a' humped hisself. We'll follow his trail a spell further by 'n' by."

While Old Misery was gone to look after the horses Beach improved the opportunity by practising with his guns, drawing first one, then the other, then both together. He fairly jumped and turned a brick red when the drawling voice broke in:

"Pretty spry with the right-hand gun. Need a little oil on your left hooks. Fumbled it twice. But pretty good for a younker."

"I thought I was alone," mumbled Beach.

8

"That's what I thought once when I was making a trade trip to the Cheyennes. I'd opened a pack and was looking at my whiskers in a trade glass and got to making up faces. Hadn't seen my face, except in water, for so long that I got interested. Reckon I made up some awful faces, just like a child."

"At last I heard a grunt, and danged if there wa'n't a dozen Injuns watching me! I felt silly for six months. But if you keep it up t'other fellow will wish he was alone when you git after him."

This had a sweet savor for Beach, but he would practise no more.

Old Misery had no interest in the diggings at the head of the gulch but was willing to go along and stand guard while Beach panned out the gravel. Once they arrived and Beach began work the old man quickly wearied of watching him and went to sleep on the sunny side of a boulder.

Beach did not work long as the day was well spent when he commenced; yet he was much pleased with his efforts as he found more of the coarse, flat scales. He was beginning to believe it would pay his employer to abandon the mill and take to washing dirt.

Everything was entirely different with Old Misery in the cabin. No shadows pressed against its walls, no alarm was felt when the horses in the corral made a racket. Beach had tried to impress upon his friend the far-reaching power of the road-agents, but the old man simply yawned and said:

"When you git good and tired of any one tell him to go to —. If them varmints bother you just keep on shooting them up. More things is cured by fine shooting than a Injun can notch on a coup stick. You've done real well in counting two coups this quick. Keep on and you'll be a chief and wear a long war-bunnet and carry the pipe and have a new song made up about you. Let's see what that old cuss with the store boots has been up to while we was up the gulch."

Beach took the book and read several chapters. The interruptions were few this time. The trend of the story was now well fixed in the mountain-man's mind, and it became as real to him as if he were an eye witness of it all. When Beach stopped and laid the book aside his companion wistfully said:

"So that's all they done while we was

gone, eh? Well, by tomorrow there'll be more doings, I reckon."

From this Beach deduced that Misery entertained the fanciful notion that the characters in the novel accumulated action between the readings.

The next day found Beach nervous. The old man observed his condition, bluntly asked the reason and demanded to know if the beans and bacon were getting low.

"By this time," Beach explained, "the gang has reached Virginia City and with more men to help them are riding back here to get me."

"Hope your medicine ain't playing any pranks on you," chuckled the old man. "We'll soon send them scooting back for still more men."

"I can't fight against the whole gang," Beach protested. "They have more'n a hundred men in it."

The old man's eyes glittered; but, not wishing to alarm his young friend, he reminded him:

"Nothing like that can happen without your friend, Beidler, knowing about it. From your talk I reckon he'd burn up the trail in gitting here first."

Beach lifted his head and agreed:

"Yes, I believe John would come to warn me."

Then his chin sagged as he added—

"Only they may be mighty sly about leaving the gulch."

"They can't be very sly in carting a dead man and a wounded man into Alder Gulch."

"Most likely they buried the Wild Cat before reaching the gulch. The other one was shot in the leg, and only his friends need know anything about it."

"Then you must hit them higher next time," encouraged Old Misery. "But let them come!"

And he swept his gaze about the cabin and noted the position of the small window and the thickness of the door.

"Lordy! Let them come! With plenty of powder 'n' lead we can stand off all the varmints they can scrape up 'tween — and Fort Benton. It ought to be a lively fuss. And won't they sit up on their haunches and hark when Solid Comfort gits to spitting!"

"Plummer is still sheriff," Beach reminded Old Misery, his deep respect for the law and its servants asserting itself.

"He can be killed just as dead as any

other man," soothed Old Misery. "And he's my meat. I've seen him strutting round in Virginy and Nevada City, and I don't like the way he walks. I'll bet a pound of terbaccer ag'in' a drink of whisky that I nail him 'tween the eyes, or on any button of his wes'coat that you might mention."

Beach gave up trying to make him understand that so long as Henry Plummer officiated as sheriff he was the mouthpiece of law and order. Old Misery insisted it was the man, not the office, which counted and won, or discouraged his respect. He then suggested reading, but Beach had no heart for it. They finally decided to cross the creek and take a look at the ancient Indian trail.

"It ain't new to me," Old Misery informed Beach as they made for the slope. "It was the Winter the Blackfeet sculpted the Crows and took their women that I passed over it."

And he halted to stare up the ridge, or to gaze back through the years to the time the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the Upper Missouri outfit of the American Fur Company were fighting each other to secure control of the beaver trade.

They climbed leisurely through the spruce to the trail. Old Misery stared at it thoughtfully, and as he looked he began mumbling fragments of ancient history in which figured the names of Bridger and Wyeth and Sublette and other famous mountain-men who were making Western history a score of years before Beach was born.

"It's an old Siksika path," he muttered. "Blackfeet, because they wore black moc-casins."

"What shall we do now? Follow it for a ways?" asked Beach, unable to see in the faint path of packed earth the visions that were filling his companion's mind.

"We'll follow it a bit. Makes me feel younger. Puts me in mind of when Tom Fitzgerald started for the Blackfoot country and the Crows stole his horses, about the same time that Jedediah Smith was gitting hisself killed by Comanches in the Cimeron Desert. In them days the Blackfeet was very strong and was better outfitted with weapons than the other tribes. When they wasn't fighting the Cheyennes they were fighting the Flatheads, who would come down here to hunt buffaler on the east side of the mountains.

"And they was always ag'in' our taking beaver from their country. The 'butcher-shop', we called it. Yes we'll follow it a bit. Makes me think of things I'd cached a mile deep in my mind."

Beach trailed along behind him. He had been over the path and was not interested. He could not appreciate the old man's frame of mind and the host of ancient memories the path had stirred into life.

Suddenly Old Misery came to a halt, and his yellowish-white beard seemed to bristle as he motioned for Beach to remain quiet. Beach craned his neck and beheld an embroidered knife-sheath in the path. Old Misery glared at it, his thin nostrils pinching in, and then stared at the surrounding spruce. For fully a minute he remained motionless, then sank on one knee and picked up the sheath and examined the beadwork with tense interest.

"Looks like the sheaths the gamblers wear in Virginia City," whispered Beach. "They're great for that kind of finery."

"No gambler ever wore this," muttered Old Misery, turning the sheath over and over in his hand. "It was lost by a Blackfoot. Now to see how he could lose it and not know it, how he could lose it without losing his knife. Had his knife in his hand, of course. Pulled it out with a yank and the sheath dropped into the trail. Why did he pull it out? Keep back while I look."

He moved along beside the trail for several yards and began to grunt.

"Here's where they was running!" he sharply exclaimed. "See! They only touched the ball of the foot an' their toes. Something scared them. That's when one of them yanked out his knife and the sheath was unfastened and lost. The owner was stirred up, scared of something, and never noticed he had dropped the sheath."

"But what could have scared them?" puzzled Beach.

"It was in the daytime. They wouldn't make a night march through this place. They're a scouting party and out for what they can see. There was shooting down in the gulch when those varmints tried to jump you. You say they threw a lot of lead all in a bunch. The Injuns was sneaking along here, the growth shutting off sight of the crick. All of a once there came a loud banging of guns and the hooting of white men. And this band—only a few,

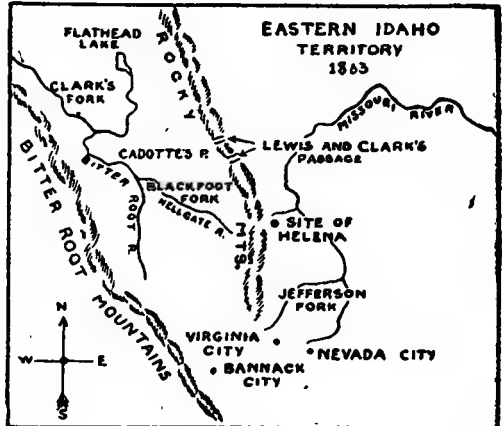
prob'ly the same ones I was dogging back here—reckoned the white men was after them.

"They was scared, stampeded like the stock of a wagon-train when the redskins waved their buffalo robes. And they started to run, gallopin'! One buck jerks out his knife because the trees are so thick they can't use their bows and arrers and only a few had guns. Yep; that's about how it happened. Reckon I'll follow it for a bit."

"The shooting was three days ago. They're far away from here now. I'm going back to the cabin. You can come when you get tired of the trail."

"I prob'ly will blow in on you some time," muttered Old Misery, now thoroughly absorbed in the work ahead of him.

Beach made down the slope and returned to the cabin. The place seemed to be very lonely. He had had no idea the old man's company had filled in so much of the day.



He had no inclination to pan out gold dust. Now that he was back in the gulch he wished he had kept along with the mountain-man. He sat down in the doorway and stared across at the blanket of spruce through which the old man was now tracking the small band of Blackfeet.

That the attack of the outlaws had spared him perhaps a raid by the red trespassers helped him none. For now that he was alone there came the old uneasiness. By this time Alder Gulch had been told about the Wild Cat's death and a fresh posse was about to arrive and demand his surrender.

One of the horses down at the corral whinnied shrilly, and with a convulsive

flop Beach rolled back from the doorway; he found his right hand holding a gun without his being conscious of having drawn the weapon. The window was on the upper side of the cabin, and to spy on the corral he was forced to thrust his head from the door. This he did very reluctantly, and the next moment was whooping joyously.

No one but Beidler would be wearing such a large white hat and such a loose coat and clumping boots. Beidler, who was afoot, waved a hand and quickened his pace.

"How's things?" he asked with a slight grin as he shook hands.

"That's for you to say," answered Beach. "I had a fight down here and wounded a man——"

"George Parish. A bad one. Nearly broke his leg."

"Why, I supposed I'd smashed it. He made enough of a howl to make me think that."

"He'll be up and around very soon. Able to sit a horse anyway."

"And I killed the Wild Cat."

"Good! That's what some of us heard, but none of the gang would talk. Five or six of us are coming to an understanding as to how the law should be enforced. They didn't fetch the Wild Cat into town, but we got it pretty straight he'd been killed."

"They must have buried him outside the gulch. Right on top of that the bartender at Kessler's—he's one of us and uncommon smart in picking up things—heard enough to show us the gang had had a setback and was planning to send out a crowd and even things up. Plummer doesn't appear in it and will make believe he knew nothing about it. I got nervous and rode out to tell you to clear out."

"Now you've told me, where do I clear out to?" anxiously asked Beach.

"Pack up your outfit and skin up to that Prickly Pear Gulch place that Ned Williamson told you about. The mountain-men came back and reported the Indians have cleared out. You can stay there for a week or so, or until I can send word to you that it's all right for you to return here. Three smokes means the coast is clear so far as this gulch is concerned. Holter will be out here soon with some picked men."

"Come inside while I get ready," said Beach.

He had turned back to the door but a sudden shuffling of feet brought his head about with a jerk. He beheld a strange tableau. Beidler had a revolver leveled at Old Misery, the mountain-man standing motionless with his hands above his head.

"Hi! Don't! It's Misery! My new friend!" yelled Beach.

"Then he better practise walking like an honest man instead of with that soft, sly step," growled Beidler, slowly lowering his gun.

Old Misery grinned and, lowering his arms, said:

"You little runt! How'd you git to be so cute with them weapons?"

"This is John Beidler, of Virginia City, my best friend," hurriedly said Beach. "John, this is Old Misery, my new friend. Wandered down here three days ago while trailing some Blackfeet."

"I don't fancy Mr. Misery's way of using language," said Beidler coldly.

"Sho! Well, now, ain't that the truth! I still say you're mighty slick with a gun. I like the way you got it on me."

Somewhat mollified, Beidler replied:

"I look bigger in action than I do just walking around. It's the hat that's out of proportion, not me. But it's my hat, and I like it."

"You're a smart little whelp, derved if you ain't," cried Old Misery. "Hand empty. Zip! Gun aiming right at my old heart. I reckoned it was some prankish boy at first when I see the hat coming with something under it. Then I changed my mind when I see the gun-play."

"I haven't time to visit with you," Beidler coldly informed him, again irritated by the old man's free speech. "My friend here is about to take a little journey for his hide's sake. Move along, Beach. Pack the supplies down to the corral."

"My pan, pick, and shovel are up the gulch."

"Holter has some in the blacksmith shop. Take those. You must be off at once, or we're in for a fight."

"But Old Mis'ry's here. Why ain't it all right to fight?" broke in the mountain-man.

"Because we're not ready."

"I'm always ready. Three of us can whip two dozen——"

"That isn't what we're after. We aim to hang twoscore. Time isn't ripe to show our hand yet," explained Beidler.

"Going to hang 'em, eh? I reckon you're deadly 's a snake even if you are sort of sawed off," declared Old Misery.

"— it, man! Will you stop talking about my personal appearance?" gritted Beidler.

"Sartain. I didn't know you was techy about it. Of course if this younker clears out I'll ride with him."

"If he wants your company he's welcome to it," was the curt reply.

Then more amiably.

"It'll be fine if you go with him. I'll feel easier about him."

As a sop to Beach's pride he added—

"Two can always watch out better than one."

Beach found the prospector's outfit in the smithy and aided by Beidler soon had the pack-horse loaded with supplies. Beidler had left his own horse some distance below the corral. The three rode together to where the ox-road left the gulch and turned back to Virginia City. Old Misery knew the country thoroughly, and there was no need of instructing him as to the northern course to Prickly Pear Creek.

At parting Old Misery again lamented the folly of running away from a fight. Beidler patiently explained:

"Things are afoot. There will be happenings soon. What we want is a cure. It's coming. Five good men in Nevada City are ready to act as one, and there are as many more in Virginia. Soon we'll have fifty men we can count on. Once we start in we'll have a hundred, a thousand.

"The most of the Alder Gulch people are honest. All they need is to have some one act as leader. Bannack City is sick of conditions. Once we rise up Bannack will fall into line. Then we'll see how the noose-cure works."

"And it will all happen while I'm away," regretted Beach.

"You can't keep me away with them doings going on," declared Old Misery.

"Nothing will happen for two weeks. Stay away that length of time, then, if you want to, come down as far as this gulch. Holter, or some of his men, will be here, and they'll be kept posted about how matters are going in Virginia. That'll give you plenty of time to be on hand when the grand show-down begins. Good luck."

Then to Old Misery.

"And good-day to you, sir."

"You peppery little cuss!" admiringly exclaimed the mountain-man.

Beidler disappeared up the winding road. Youth and Age pressed on toward the north. The shadows of the western mountains were creeping over ridge and gulch, but the shadow of crime already lay heavy there; nor would it pass with the morrow's sun.

CHAPTER VIII

THREE'S A CROWD

IN CROSSING the twelve-mile-wide valley of Crow Creek Old Misery kept a sharp watch for signs of Indians and of his friends who had ridden to the valley from Virginia City. They found some deserted diggings and near by a grave with the name "A. H. Goff" cut on a tree at its head. Old Misery believed that this was the man his friends had fared north to find and bury. After leaving the creek and when well across the broad valley they came upon the mutilated body of a white man. Beach was inexpressibly shocked by the sad spectacle.

Old Misery, after his first glance at the body, began casting about until he found a trail which led to the west. Turning back to Beach, he announced:

"Twenty Blackfeet. Signs must be three days old. They're off for the Hellgate or the Blackfoot River, don't know which. 'Fraid they was hiding round here. Too bad about the young feller. 'Bout your age, I'd say. He must 'a' wandered over here from the Deer Lodge country. He had a shod pack-hoss with him. Injuns took it and all his outfit."

"Such a terrible death!" faltered Beach. "Horrible! Horrible!"

"It all happened after the boys got here and buried t'other feller. If this poor cuss could 'a' come while they was here they'd told him of the danger and he might 'a' rode back to Alder Gulch with them. S'pose we ought to bury him."

Beach pointed to the west, where a column of smoke was streaking into the heavens. Old Misery watched it for a moment and shook his head dubiously.

"That makes it a trifle more binding," he muttered. "Reckon that's Blackfoot smoke. I don't hanker to be caught down in here. Reckon we'll pile brush 'n' rocks over him and give him a earth burying when we have more time."

His drawling voice betrayed no concern, but his motions were sprightly as he left the saddle and began collecting brush. Beach dismounted and helped, and as a last service to the dead man sacrificed one of his blankets for a shroud. Old Misery protested:

"Nights gitting cool. You may need it. He don't."

"To keep the brush from him," muttered Beach. "It's all I can do. The blanket came from the farm; a home blanket. I hope he sleeps sound."

Old Misery eyed him curiously but made no further objections. With the unfortunate decently covered, the mountain-man displayed a keen desire to get out of the valley and up on the divide between North Boulder Creek and the Prickly Pear Valley. Not until they were on the crest of the ridge did he lose his air of being in nervous haste.

It was his purpose to cross the ridge and descend into the Prickly Pear Valley, but he found that the rains had deeply torn the flanks of the ridge and had washed grass and pebbles down the base of the rough slope. The growth now hid the smoke, or else the signal had finished its work, and Misery complacently announced they were in excellent position to make a fight, or run for it.

That night they camped on the ridge. In the morning Misery decided there was no object in making haste, and he doubted if the most direct route would prove to be the shortest. Instead of searching for an easy descent into the valley he leisurely led the way along a ridge that branched off from the first, extending between the Prickly Pear and the Missouri.

When they did work down into the valley it was to strike Ten-Mile Creek, the principal tributary of the Pear. The rank vegetation on the gentler slopes was a most welcome sight to Beach, as it reminded him of the Madison prairie country. His companion explained that the rainfall had been more heavy than usual, and that at another season the openings might be dry and parched enough.

There was no sign of any human habitation in the valley so far as the two adventurers could discover, but the valley was irregular and was not to be viewed as one continuous stretch. It seemed to be formed by a series of small and pleasing valleys that were separated by ridges until they

merged in a broad, open prairie land. These meadow-like openings, rich in grass, were most welcome to the horses and aroused in Beach a desire to sow wheat and plant vegetables.

Old Misery insisted they must make a camp where the country was not so open. He had no thought for agricultural possibilities and was more interested in the weathered, rusty-brown gneiss rocks solely because their formations reminded him of the Laramie Range. They worked down the stream to where it emptied into the Prickly Pear Creek, and then turned to follow the latter to its head, with the reddish granitic rocks accompanying them.

At times they were passing between high hills thickly covered with pine, and again the granite stood forth naked and sculptured into stately columns and pillars. Beach said it was like gazing on the ruins of ancient castles. Old Misery said it was proof the original growth had been weakly rooted and that the rains had made "a clean job" of washing the face of the heights.

They made their camp on the site of modern Helena and not far from the spot where within a year John Cowan, a Georgian, was to take his last chance at mining and so name the small gulch and claim that were to yield to others some sixteen million dollars in gold and rank next to Alder Gulch in gold discoveries. But that night there was nothing to hint at the golden treasure.

The sun sank in a lake of fire. The evening breeze, sighing through the pines, whispered many an old story to the mountain-man, but had naught to tell of gold.

Old Misery sat and sucked at his pipe and stared at the blazing west until the lake of fire turned to ashes. Beach, too, was under a spell, but found himself in sympathy with the solitude. As the darkness swept down the valley they threw fuel on the coals and reclined on their blankets and watched the sparkling heavens perform the Master's will.

Morning found Beach strangely indifferent to the rich diggings described by Ned Williamson. After breakfast he told Old Misery the story without any show of enthusiasm. The mountain-man pulled out his knife and with the point sketched a rough map of the valley, and, sticking the blade deep into the soil, said:

"It's about there, at the mouth of a little gulch emptying into the valley. And that

means it's about *here*, right where we be now. What do you say to scouting round a bit and looking for signs?"

Beach's indifference began to wane. To realize that he was close to the secret diggings, originally discovered by John Silverthorne, the first miner in the Rocky Mountains, and visited by Ned Williamson, made him hungry to investigate. The night before he had been well pleased to rest and dream. Now the gold fever was creeping into his veins again. In Ramshorn Gulch the work of washing pay dirt had been prosaic enough; but now the adventure was colored with romance.

"You scout if you want to, but I'm going to pan out some gravel," he decided aloud.

"Queer you ain't cur'ous to see what is new country to you. Queer you can settle down to swinging a pick when you don't know what you might see just beyond the divide," commented Old Misery.

"I'm curious to learn if there's any truth in that yarn that was told me," was Beach's response.

"If Williamson said he found rich diggings here you can bet a bale of pelts he did. But why you want to find it and be bothered with it beats me. You'll have to file a claim. The minute you show up with any dust you'll be dogged by every man in Alder Gulch. But go ahead, and while you're washing out trouble for yourself I'll scoot up on the divide and take a peek at the same rocks that was standing there before the first Injuns came."



AS THE buckskin figure disappeared under the pines Beach almost regretted being left alone. It required some minutes for his thoughts to get back on a gold basis. Even after he had carried his pick, shovel and pan down the creek and began excavating the soil his mind was straying wide of his quest.

For the first ten pans he found nothing better than he had washed out in Ramshorn and his disappointment was deep. He straightened up to rest his back and stared in disgust at the area of muddy water floating down the creek.

He wondered if Williamson actually had found gold in paying quantities, or if all men were liars when it came to telling of rich diggings far removed. He decided it was human nature to exaggerate the worth of what was left behind. Ramshorn Gulch

began to take on glittering possibilities in his mind's eye.

"If Ned had struck it rich he'd surely have stuck along until he had made a year's grub-stake," he grumbled.

Then there was Silverthorne, a prospector by instinct, as shown by the gold he had taken to Fort Benton in the early days. He had been in the valley and had quit it. Why had he left it if he knew it held pay gravel? Beach didn't believe he would have left it had he possessed such knowledge. Silverthorne's visit was subject to proof, however. If he had worked in the valley some discernible signs would remain as evidence.

Abandoning the spot where he had found only a few colors to a pan, Beach followed up the creek for a half a mile above the camp. He halted when he came to where the bed-rock was exposed. Whether the elements had stripped it bare, or Silverthorne or Williamson had been the agencies, he could not tell. He fancied he could detect scratches left by a pick, but was not sure.

He filled his pan and after washing out the dirt found he had obtained thirty cents' worth of gold. With quickening interest he plied pick and shovel and again filled his pan and kneeled by the stream.

Rapidly spilling the water and loose dirt over the side of the pan, he found what he took to be several small pebbles. A closer inspection drove him to his feet and sent him dancing madly about the pan. The supposed pebbles were tiny nuggets, worth from five to ten dollars apiece; and there were eight of them besides some specks and scales of gold. His hand trembled as he washed them and tied them up in his handkerchief.

Breathing hard and with his eyes dilated and beholding nothing but the fresh excavation, he dumped another twenty-five pounds of dirt into the pan and obtained a similar result. Blackfoot Indians or clumsily moving road-agents could have approached him openly and he would not have seen them.

The one word ringing through his head was *gold!* It shut out all other sounds. It blinded him. He had found it! He, a young tenderfoot, fresh from growing potatoes and turnips, had made a strike that would empty Alder Gulch of half its population could his discovery be announced in Virginia City. He took a vast

pride in himself. His father and sister would be proud of him.

Then the irony of road-agents plotting and risking their lives in robbing stage-coaches appealed to him as being very humorous, and he laughed uproariously. Why, all the poor fools had to do was to go prospecting and do some hard work if they wished for a fortune.

He strutted around the handkerchief for a few minutes while he paid tribute to himself. The fact that Silverthorne had been there, that Ned Williamson had been there and had retailed the secret to him, that Old Misery had led him to the spot, belittled his own exploit none. His was the pick and his was the pan that had uncovered the treasure.

He could make only a rough estimate of what the gold was worth, but he knew it must be nearly a hundred dollars. He was young and strong and had the day before him. Surely he could repeat the process a hundred times, and even if his luck did not increase beyond a hundred dollars to the pan he would have made ten thousand dollars!

Why, grant him ten days of such profitable employment and he would take out one hundred thousand dollars. A hundred days would net him a million! Two hundred days——

Then he struck the down-slope and began to worry. The figures and their immense potentials made his head feel queer. Then came worry over the problem of getting the gold away. Then came a white-hot hatred against all pilferers who would lie in wait to rob him.

His mood shifted, and he became suspicious and sly. He told himself that he must be very cunning. No one must know about the gold. It would not be necessary to return to Virginia City. He could strike across-country to Fort Benton.

Next he worried because of the danger of arriving at Benton too late to take passage down the river. Whichever way he turned his thoughts he was faced by hydra-headed fear.

Of course he might not make a million dollars; and there was a certain relief in this thought. Next he remembered that the working days were few before the season closed, and he grieved to know his fortune was arbitrarily limited by the calendar.

There was no recompense in assuring him-

self that he could start early in the Spring and comb the gulch clean. Others might stumble upon the riches. And again, whether he made millions or less, he was insistent upon taking it all.

With something like a shock he remembered Old Misery. Surely the old man was entitled to the claim next to the discovery claim.

And there was Ned Williamson. He had promised Ned he should fare handsomely out of any strike. True, Williamson had disclaimed any desire to share in a discovery, but men change their minds when the gold is shoved under their noses. Yes, Ned must have the other claim next to the discovery claim.

"I'm either crazy or growing mighty mean," muttered Beach as he remembered Beidler.

How could he have left such a good friend out of his reckoning? Certainly "X" must share in his good fortune.

The reaction left him in a more wholesome frame of mind. Once his imagination began to give away millions the more simple his problem grew. Three claims for himself, father and sister; one each for Beidler, Williamson, Old Misery, Holter, Carlton, Griscom, Silverthorne and Sessions the preacher. Silverthorne had no claim on him through friendship, but as the original discoverer he should be remembered.

It required prospective prosperity to awaken in Beach a full realization of how much he was indebted to his friends.

More soberly he resumed his work and was not surprised to find pan after pan yielding a hundred dollars and upward. He no longer bothered to tie the nuggets in his handkerchief but piled them carefully on a smooth piece of exposed rock. Ten times did the pan richly repay his labors; and then a drawling voice made him jump by saying,

"Seems like you're having a —— of a time all by yourself."

Old Misery cackled to see his companion leap into the air and face about.

"Reckon you made a little strike and forgot there was anything else in the world. What if I'd been an Injun?"

"But you're not. You're my good friend!" cried Beach.

Then with a sweep of his hand he said:

"This is the discovery claim, and it runs for fifty feet on both sides up and down the

gulch. Locate your claim on either side of me. Ned Williamson has the other. Then comes Beidler, Sessions, my father, sister, then——"

"Hold on! Where's the stuff you took out?" sharply broke in Old Misery.

Beach pointed to the little mound of nuggets. Old Misery squatted before them and scraped one with his long knife.

"Danged if you ain't hit it!" he mumbled. "You ain't a tenderfoot no longer. You're a pilgrim."

This bestowal of the name given only to those who had proven their wisdom through ripe experiences tickled Beach's vanity.

"But why does Old Mis'ry take a claim?" the old man went on. "He ain't found nothing."

"Because you brought me here. Because you've been friendly."

"Wait a bit! If I met you on the trail and you didn't have no blankets I'd share mine with you," growled the old man. "You'd think I was a —— of a cuss if in the morning I charged you, say, four bits for the use of the blanket. Now I'm going to take a few of these just as I'd take some of your beans 'n' bacon. They'll buy me some terbaccer and liquor."

And he swept up a small handful of the nuggets and carelessly dropped them into his embroidered tobacco-bag.

His lazy voice next explained:

"You mean well by the old man, younker, but I'm too old to git het up over a gold-mine. Never knew a man yet what found one that wasn't in for some cussed bad luck. And I'm too old to change my ways. I was brought up on beaver, not pay gravel. If I took a claim here I'd die inside the year a-worrying that some one was going to take it from me."

"You go ahead and cache a small mountain of gold and some day I'll come along and ask for a few hunks. I don't want any claim. The way you're sweating it looks like it was hard work."

"You don't want a claim?" blankly asked Beach.

"Rising seventy-six. Wouldn't git a crick in my back and rheumatiz by wading in that water for all the gold that ever was. That's what killed Gold Dick and lots of other fellers. They found gold. I only hope it won't fetch no harm to you."

"And do you know it's long past grub-time and that we must be eating? You've

done enough for today. No one's going to steal this gulch. I'm hungry!"

Beach concealed his tools in a clump of bushes and gathered up his nuggets.

Old Misery watched him secrete the pick and shovel with amusement twinkling in his old eyes. His whimsical voice drawled:

"Hiding your things, eh? You must be expecting lots of company."

"I was forgetting," confessed Beach. "But isn't it wonderful I should find all this dust? I keep feeling I'll wake up and find it's all a dream. Yes, sir! When I go back to Virginia City I'll go as a pilgrim. How they'll crowd around me and fire questions! It seems like a dream."

"Sometimes I reckon that the whole business of what we call living is just a dream," soberly said Old Misery. "Dreams of something we saw some time or t'other a thousand years ago. I keep finding mountains and lakes I never see before as Old Misery, and yet I know just how they're going to look—like I'd seen them before."

"The first time I had the feeling hard was when I got my first squint at the Three Tetons. I was a younker then, but the minute I spotted them I said, 'I've been here before.'"

"Pardner of mine knew I was new to the country. He says, 'You're a liar.'"

"After we'd fit each other till both was tuckered out I 'splained what I meant. He said he'd felt the same way and was sorry he'd called me a liar, and 'lowed I had more fight coming to me if I wasn't satisfied. I took him on ag'in, but he licked me something handsome. Poor Sim! Wiped out near the east mouth of what is now Bridger's Pass."

They returned to their camping-place and rebuilt their fire, and Beach, ashamed to have forgotten the noon-day meal, bestirred himself to cook the bacon. After they'd eaten, Old Misery lighted his pipe and between puffs remarked—

"I done some prospecting a few miles up north."

He paused and fussed with the burning tobacco, and Beach, sensing some discovery, prompted him to continue.

"I found that," said the old man, tossing over an arrow-head of sheet iron. "Dropped within a few hours of the time I found it. Made from the bottom of a frying-pan. Prob'ly some poor cuss wiped out."

"Blackfeet!" whispered Beach, instinctively cuddling the Henry rifle closer to his side.

Old Misery was not positive.

"If it was it's a different band than was down in Ramshorn Gulch. Much bigger party. The band that lost the knife-sheath was heading wrong to git up here ahead of us. This band come from the northeast. I'll scout some after I finish my pipe.

"You can wash out some more gold. Better cache it somewhere so if we have to light out on the jump you won't have to bother with it. Wonder how much gold miners have cached and then left and never went back for!"

Beach considered the advice to be good and, aided by his friend, made a cache at the foot of a lightning-blasted pine. Old Misery estimated his day's work thus far to be in the neighborhood of a thousand dollars. But Beach did not show any exultation; fear of Indians was diluting his joy. He wished that one might dig gold in the same security that one hoed potatoes. While feeling himself to be a veteran in panning out the precious metal he was worried by the problem of returning to civilization with his nuggets intact.

Old Misery seemed to understand his mood, for he remarked:

"If you want to be happy don't try to pile up gold dust. The less a man has the happier he oughter be. I have my gun, pipe and hoss. When I die I'll take just as much with me as any gold-miner will. Well, reckon I have time to make a little scout."

Beach took his rifle and returned to his diggings. The bed-rock he was cleaning up continued to give the same encouraging return for pan after pan. Only now the fortunate prospector had Indians in his mind. As he moved about he lost time by pausing and glancing suspiciously at the pines. He observed he was uneasy unless his rifle was close at hand. He worked himself up to such a state of nervous tension that at last he declared—

"I'll wash out one more pan and then go back to camp."

Anxious to finish the pan and quite indifferent as to the result, he piled it high with dirt taken some rods from the creek. He washed it hurriedly and carelessly. The accumulation of nuggets astounded him. It was three times richer than any pan for the day, and the nuggets were larger. He

believed that some of them would weigh more than twenty dollars, and he valued the total deposit in the bottom of the pan at three hundred dollars.

Even the danger of being jumped by Indians could not smother the thrill that shot through him. He ran back to the spot and cleared away more of the top soil and uncovered a shallow furrow-like depression in the bed-rock. Nuggets of gold were packed in this depression and were of a size that permitted him to pick them out without bothering to wash away the loose dirt.

This strike transcended anything he had imagined; and as one dazed he cleared the exposed section of the hollow and held the larger nuggets in his hand and endeavored to estimate their weight before placing them in his pan. He placed the value of the entire lot at eighteen hundred dollars, and feverishly tried again. Now he discovered that the shallow groove, or trough, extended at a right angle to the creek and was not an isolated depression. Instead of one small pocket it was a continuous storehouse. He cleared two feet more of the bedrock without reaching the end of the furrow.

With no further thought of using the pan for washing the dirt he utilized it as a receptacle, and, picking with both hands, placed the nuggets in it. He believed the two feet of treasure panned out considerably better than two thousand dollars, one nugget alone weighing five hundred dollars. And the pay dirt he was ignoring was rich in dust and tiny scales. Not until five years should roll by and a drain ditch should expose bed-rock in Confederate Gulch and afford a yield of a thousand dollars to a pan would Beach's strike be approached in richness. And Confederate Gulch was not yet known, let alone named, as he recklessly scattered pay gravel in his wild desire to strip clean the little furrow.

No thought now of Indians! Had he been in a closed tent his vision could not have been more narrowly circumscribed. He saw only the earth at his feet and the raw scar his pick and shovel were making.

"No time for dust and little stuff!" he panted aloud as he continued his exertions, the sweat streaming down into his eyes and half-blinding him.

The narrow storehouse held out and seemed to extend to the foot of the ridge. It excelled his wildest expectations, and promised to be richer than any quartz mine. He

laughed hysterically as he recalled his former conception of great good luck, such as a hundred dollars to the pan.

By the time he discovered that the daylight was failing he had taken out nearly ten thousand dollars in gold, and the end of the furrow had not been reached.

A low whistle brought him back to earth, and he made a frantic dive for the Henry rifle.



OLD MISERY glided from under the pines and queried—

"Think I was a redskin whistling so's to s'prize you?"

"I've struck it rich! I've struck it rich!" hoarsely cried Beach. "This morning you said I was a pilgrim. There's no doubt about my being one now! Rich, I tell you! What I got by panning isn't grub-stakes alongside of this. Look at that pan! Took it out with my fingers! See them! Heft them!"

"You'll be richer if you save your hair," grimly replied Old Misery. "Now you simmer down. Quit this foolish business and make for the camp. There's Injuns on both ridges and I reckon they suspect we're down here."

"Indians!" blankly exclaimed Beach, scratching his head and staring about him. "I forgot about them."

Then in a subdued fury he gritted:

"But I'll fight! I'll fight hard! It's my big chance. No Indians shall spoil it. It's mine! I'll keep it!"

And he glared his defiance at the silent slopes.

"Then shake your wits together and step sharp. Be as keen to save your hide as you be to keep your gold. None of them have come down into the valley yet as far as I know. But they're up there, on both sides, and they wouldn't be sticking around if they didn't have a notion some one was down here."

Beach picked up the pan of nuggets. Old Misery carried the two rifles. They had covered half the distance to the camp when an arrow flashed over the mountain-man's shoulder and stuck in a pine, the shaft whipping back and forth with much elasticity. Without a word the old man pulled Beach behind a tree.

"That arrer-head is made out of a piece of wagon-tire or the bottom of a frying-pan. If it had hit you it would lap round a bone and bother most mortal."

"What do we do now?" whispered Beach as he shifted the precious pan under one arm and drew a revolver.

"Just keep moving toward the camp so they can't run off our hosses. It's a good sign they ain't rushed us yet, and the fellow don't give any cry, being afraid we'll pot him. That may mean he's alone, some young buck out to make a killing. Whole thing makes me hope they ain't Blackfeet. Looks more like some sneaking Crow work."

Darting from tree to tree, they gained their camping-place without being fired upon a second time and without any cry of discovery being raised. Old Misery was now positive that the lone scout was too far from his band to communicate with it by sounding his war-cry. He secured the horses and got the camp equipment together while Beach cached the gold.

"I'm sartain only one scout come down here. He tried to count coup and by this time is skedaddling back up the ridge to tell what he see. I oughter thought it all out when he failed to raise a yell, or shoot a second arrer."

"He'll tell the band we're streaking it down the valley toward the Missouri. Time he catches up with them it'll be too dark for them to do anything except travel along the top of the ridge to cut us off down below. So we'll take our outfit and sneak up the valley till we strike a small blind cañon."

Beach was skeptical about their reaching the head of the valley without being intercepted, and yet was very loath to abandon his diggings. Old Misery was confident his theory was correct and that the morning would find both bands fifteen miles distant, watching for their quarry to show up near the Missouri.

With the packs in place the old mountain-man set the pace at a rapid walk along the edge of the pines. The growth would prevent them from being seen by Indians on the right-hand ridge even in the daytime. They trusted to the thickening dusk to protect them from the gaze of the band on the opposite ridge.

A mile beyond where Beach had cleared the bed-rock they turned from the main valley into a deep and narrow gulch that ended against a wall of limestone. The horses pressed forward willingly, and Old Misery said:

"I knowed there must be good water in

here. There's a patch of green ahead. Grass won't show like that unless it's well watered. My moccasins feel damp. We'll find a good spring there."

The knowledge that there was no back entrance to the gulch gave a pleasing sense of security. Unless taken by surprise two men could hold the narrow mouth against many times their number. There was no water problem to face, and they had supplies more than sufficient to tire out the patience of the enemy.

Should the redskins prove to be unusually persistent, reminded Old Misery—only this did not appeal to Beach—there were the horses. The mountain-man was inclined to minimize their danger even if the Indians did discover their hiding-place. He explained this attitude by giving it to be his firm belief the Indians were Crows and not Blackfeet. The Crows, he explained, did not hold the deadly antipathy toward whites that the Blackfeet held.

"Thirty odd years back I'd give them a call, and they'd treat me as a friend. I lived with them one season, collecting robes for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Married one of their women. She was a fine woman and the best robe-maker I ever see.

"Long-Haired Chief" was boss of that village. He had hair ten feet long. Never had been cut since the old buck was a baby, and he must 'a' been eighty when I wintered with them. Worshiped his hair. Talked to it and made feasts to it. He was a queer old cuss."

Beach was surprised when his companion said it would be safe to build a small fire for cooking the evening meal. He selected a spot in an alcove of rocks which concealed the tiny blaze from any one passing the mouth of the gulch.

The evening passed without any alarms. They agreed to stand watch, the old man taking the first. With his fears allayed Beach turned in, but he could scarcely believe he had slept more than a few minutes when Old Misery was shaking his shoulder.

"Are they coming?" whispered Beach, rolling from his blanket.

The mountain-man yawned and explained—

"Time for you to stand guard."

"Lord, but I must have been tired!" ruefully muttered Beach as he rubbed his drowsy eyes.

And not until he had visited the spring and had thrown cold water over his head did he consider himself to be awake. He could not see the moon because of the walls of the gulch; but it was abroad and lighting the outer valley. To guard against the return of drowsiness he walked down to the mouth of the gulch, taking only his hand guns.

He felt no apprehensions. He had been told that the Indian was not inclined to attack during the night, and aside from that assurance there was something very comforting in the silver light. The naked rocks and rugged walls were softened and toned down to harmonize with the carved columns. The floor of the main valley was smooth as velvet, all inequalities being hidden. The heavy growth was so much ebony. For the ear there was the ghostly whispering of the breeze through the pines.

Beach relished the beauty of it all and fell to thinking of his father and Josette. He seated himself on a rock where he could look down the valley. When he remembered the gold it was only to plan how much he could do with it for his father and sister.

Williamson had said that four out of every five prospectors failed to discover pay-dirt. Beach Content had succeeded. He was no longer a tenderfoot, but a pilgrim. He had attained caste.

Yet the egotism of the afternoon had given way to thankfulness. He had been precipitated into desperate adventures, and, thanks to his new friends and a lot of luck, had won out.



A SQUIRREL made a slight noise at the foot of a pine on his left.

There in the mellow night the world was unreal, and his mind was untroubled by the fears and vanities which had tormented him in the sunshine. The mountains and the valley were of dream stuff; he, Beach Content, was of dream stuff.

Somehow he had the same feeling of security one has when reveling in fancies on the edge of sleep. The squirrel had wandered from the tree and was much closer to him. The gold was snugly cached, even as a squirrel stores up his treasures of seeds and nuts.

He shifted his position uneasily. Squirrels did not roam about at night! He leaned to one side to see the better, and from the ground came a flash of fire and a booming explosion. With an inarticulate cry Beach

was on his feet with both hands spitting fire. He had felt the heavy ball tug at his sleeve, and in the next second he was on the alert and shooting at something on the ground; something that flopped and twisted convulsively for a few moments.

The quiet of the valley was that of a dead world as he leaned forward and glared at the dark blotch. Then came the sound of Old Misery's voice, yelping and worrying as the mountain-man raced down the gulch.

"Is it you, boy? Is that you standing there?" fiercely demanded the old man.

"I'm all right," faltered Beach.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know. Something—some one—fired at me—from the ground. I shot back. I was thinking about my folks; then it came—the shot. I was shooting back before I knew it. It's right over there."

And he pointed a shaky hand toward the blotch under the pine.

With a snarl Old Misery whipped out his butcher-knife and ran forward. He dropped on his knees and after a few moments of silence softly called—

"Come here!"

Beach unwillingly advanced.

"You got him three times," muttered the old man. "Sound of them shots must carry far tonight, but the growth would muffle them to any one up the ridge. It's one of their scouts. He's got a bow and arrer. Reckon he's the same piece of pizen that took a shot at us when we was making for camp."

"Catch hold of his heels. We must hide him up the gulch. They'll know he run into something when he don't show up, but if they're still on the divide they won't know where it happened."

Though very loath to do so, Beach caught hold of the moccasined feet and fringed leggings, and the two of them carried the dead Indian into the gulch and to their camp-fire. The coals still glowed, and Old Misery threw on a handful of dry brush. By the increased light he scanned the fierce features anxiously.

"Thank the Lord it's a Crow and not a Blackfoot!" he whispered. "The rest of them must be poking along the ridges. They'll hate to quit their hosses to come down here. If this cuss was a Blackfoot we'd have had all of them swarming round us before this."

"Let's bury him and have it done with," urged Beach.

Old Misery, squatting on his heels, locked and unlocked his fingers nervously, and his voice was uneasy as he said:

"Don't seem a square shake to bury him. He's paid for everything he's done. He tried to wipe you out; but even a Injun has a right to his feelings, and they ain't always been treated square. It does seem too harsh to bury him."

Beach gaped in amazement and wondered if his friend was losing his mind. He wanted to see no more of those staring eyes, with the firelight playing upon them and giving a leering expression to the savage face.

"Let's have done with it," he insisted. "I don't know what you mean by such talk. The poor —— spoiled the sleeve of my shirt, but I'm not holding that against him. Perhaps I didn't understand you right, your talk about not burying him."

"It wouldn't be a square shake," persisted Old Misery, fumbling at his beard. "Kill them, yes. Bury them, no."

"You've lost your senses," muttered Beach, aghast.

More composedly the mountain-man explained:

"It's like this: A Crow Injun has a mortal horror of being covered up in the ground. He ain't scared of death any more'n a Blackfoot is; but he'd be scared blue if he reckoned he was to be hid in the ground instead of being stuck up on poles to dry. He reckons that it's the end of him if he's buried. I don't like to chase a man beyond death to git even with him. Take your own case; how'd you like to be buried?"

"I certainly hope to be when I die!" exclaimed Beach.

"I don't. I don't want to be," muttered Old Misery; and Beach began to understand that the season his companion spent with the Crows, and the many other seasons he had lived with different tribes, had warped his white man's mind and had left him partly red. "It's the worst thing you could do to that fellow——"

"Oh, do what you will! Only let's get him clear of the camp!"

"Then catch hold of him ag'in. After we've toted him up to the wall I'll fetch his gun and his bow and arrer. And to show we ain't got no spite I'll pull some hairs from my hoss' tail and put them with him so he'll have plenty of hosses to ride."

Beach's part of the gruesome business was soon finished. Certain superstitious rites occupied Old Misery longer. But at last the smooth-bore trade musket and the bow and arrows and the bunch of horse hair were in place beside the dead warrior on his couch formed by the out-cropping of a shelf of rock.

Beach no longer relished the camping-place, but he was amazed that Old Misery should sit with his hands clasped about his knees and give way to much groaning. On being urged to control himself and explain his agitation the old man confessed:

"I didn't give you a square shake, younker. I'm low down. I deserve to be hid in the earth. It would be a honest judgment ag'in' me."

"Good Heavens, man! Are you crazy, or what is it now?" begged Beach.

"I done you dirt the worst kind. I lied to you. It ain't my fault you ain't dead. But you seemed so young and husky and I'm rising seventy-six——"

"Will you explain?"

"It's like this, younker," groaned Old Misery, still rocking back and forth. "I woke you up after you'd been snorting less'n half a hour. I was low down 'nough to turn you out to do double watch while I stole your sleep-spell. Of course if you'd noticed the moon and stars you'd 'a' known. I cheated you. Reckon the older a man gits the more o'nary he gits."

"Is that all?" cried Beach in great relief. "I was afraid either you or I was going crazy. And I sha'n't close my eyes tonight, so go back to your blankets and sleep if you can."

Old Misery, now that he knew he was forgiven his deceit, yawned luxuriously and meekly said:

"Thanky. I'll try to catch a wink or two. No use for both of us to stay awake. Some one in this outfit oughter git a little sleep."

And Beach did not believe a full minute elapsed before his companion was sleeping soundly. But there was no desire on his part to slumber; he could not get the notion out of his mind that the dead Indian would prefer the companionship of the little fire and would be stalking into the little circle of light at any moment.



OLD MISERY at sunrise found him standing near the mouth of the gulch, the Henry rifle over his arm. The mountain-man made a fire that would give off no smoke and cooked the breakfast.

Then he insisted that Beach lie down and rest. Beach denied that he was tired, but once he threw himself on the blankets he knew nothing until late afternoon. When he awoke, Old Misery was standing by him, leaning on his long rifle.

"You must 'a' been pretty nigh tuckered out," remarked the mountain-man. "I left this word for you so's you wouldn't git nervous if you woke up before I got back." And he picked up a smooth flat rock on which he had scrawled with a burnt stick—

Wate t l i com bak.

"You're going outside?" asked Beach, uneasy at the thought of being left alone with the dead Indian.

"I've been. Never footed it hotter in my life. Went up the ridge back of us and found their trail. Whole band has gone down to the mouth of the crick. They must 'a' been well down there when the redskin sneaked a shot at you last night. I figger he was cute 'nough to reckon we might play some trick like what we did, and without telling his friends he stole down here to win a new war name by getting a sculp or two.

"I didn't have time to scout t'other ridge, but if one band went to the mouth of the valley t'other must have. So I reckon we're all hunky and can dig out of here at any time we want to."

"I'm going to take my gold with me," said Beach.

"Seems a waste of time when you could git it when you're happening back here some day, but we can do it," agreed the old man.

"I'm going to clean off some more bed-rock and get some more nuggets," added Beach.

"You've got more gold now than you'll ever use," protested Old Misery. "Let's foot it round and see what we can see. We can follow them Crows and see what they're up to."

"No, sir! If the Crows will keep clear of me I'll never tag them. Scout if you want to. I'm going to dig gold. But before you start off on any trip we must change our camp."

"What! Shift camp and quit good grass, water and wood?"

"And a dead Indian. You're forgetting him. I won't stay here another day."

Old Misery fretted and complained at

what he considered to be an annoying whim, but finally surrendered and said that there was another gulch a quarter of a mile up the valley where they could make a snug camp. They packed their belongings there without delay, and Beach breathed more freely. It was too late to start on a scout or to dig for gold, and they postponed all activities until the morrow.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHEEL BEGINS TO TURN

FROM Bannack City to the ranch on Rattlesnake Creek, fifteen miles, George Ives rode furiously. He halted at the ranch only long enough to secure a fresh mount from the corral and to speak hurriedly to one of the herders. The fresh horse was spared none and was almost exhausted when allowed to halt at a herder's hut two miles from the ranch buildings on Bob Dempsey's ranch. Two herders emerged to investigate the clattering hoofs; and, ordering one to bring a fresh horse, Ives spoke sharply to the other, repeating the orders he had given at the Rattlesnake. Galloping up the stage road, he held his animal to the limit of his speed until near Alder Gulch, when he reined down to a sedate gait. Near the town he dismounted and wiped the lather from the animal.

Leaving the weary horse in front of the Virginia Hotel, he refreshed him with a pail of water and then entered the bar and with a sweeping gesture invited the loungers to drink. As he satisfied his own thirst his eyes swept the room and the lifted brows conveyed a signal to an unsavory-appearing fellow known as the "Spaniard."

A tilt of the brows and a glance toward the door sent the fellow outside, where Ives found him on quitting the barroom. Ives paused, ostensibly to light a cigar, and from the corner of his mouth queried.

"Plummer?"

"Wallace Street," muttered the Spaniard without glancing at him.

Ives' fingers holding the match gave a convulsive jerk, and, chewing the cigar savagely, he set off to find the sheriff. Again Ives felt a premonition of danger when he beheld the sheriff standing before a store that had been occupied until recently by Lloyd Magruder, a merchant of Lewiston beyond the mountains.

Plummer sensed that something was wrong, although Ives' face was expressionless. Yet Ives' handsome countenance did reveal some suppressed emotion as he glanced at the store, where, a little more than two weeks before, the Lewiston merchant had cleaned out his stock at a profit of fourteen thousand dollars in gold and with more than a score of mules and horses had started to return to Lewiston.

"Been seeing a ghost?" murmured Plummer after a casual nod.

"I may see some if I stay here long."

"What's wrong?"

"Come away from this cursed place. My nerves are jumping like fleas in a greaser's hut."

"Losing your nerve?" jeered Plummer. "Spit it out. This is a good place to talk. Too many passing for any one to spy on us."

"I don't like this street nor this store. They've found Magruder and the rest of them. I've used up three horses bringing the word here ahead of the stage. One minute after the news was brought to Bannack City I was riding down Main Street as if the devil was after me."

Plummer's lips twitched a bit, and he whispered—

"Devil's after all of us if the job has been bungled."

Now it was his turn to glance apprehensively at the store as if he expected to behold the merchant's face at the window.

"Can't blame you for shying from this place. We'll go somewhere and get a drink. Any of the boys suspected?"

"Not that I could learn, but I quit Bannack on the jump. None of them have shown up, so I reckon they kept right on going. They must have made an awful mess of it. They had all the country west of the Rockies to play the game in; and, by —, they turned the trick in the Bitter-root Range, eight days out from Bannack City! The game was absolutely safe, and they spoiled it! I tell you, Henry, there's going to be — to pay! The country will never stand for five of them wiped out in a bunch."

Plummer was fighting hard to keep fear from showing in his gaze.

"We must get somewhere alone and talk it over," he muttered.

He turned his head and waved a cheery salute to a storekeeper.

"The boys are well on their way to the

coast by this time," he went on. "We know nothing about them. But we must talk things over and make our plans."

"We've no time to talk anything over," impatiently replied Ives. "You know now as much as I do. A hunter found where the last camp was made. It must have been a ghastly piece of work, for they built two big fires to cover up the blood."

"When the hunter found the fires he was curious to know why two had been built. He poked around in the ashes and found some buttons and buckles and cooking-dishes. The fools couldn't have been more clumsy if they'd tried their —est. He struck a trail and found a gunny-sack, filled with bits of stuff that wouldn't burn, hid behind a log. They didn't even know enough to make a clean search of the ashes. There was a skim of snow around the camp and the hunter found moccasin tracks in it."

"Come! That was clever!" exclaimed Plummer, his manner brightening. "Say what you will, but Jim Romaine and Doc Howard are pretty slick after all. The moccasin tracks will make it look as if the Indians did it."

"Yah!" snarled Ives under his breath. "But would Indians throw away guns? The hunter even found the dead men's guns. Would Indians burn up a lot of camping-outfit?"

"Where were—they found?" whispered Plummer.

"Wrapped in their blankets at the foot of a cliff; another Indian trick, I suppose the idiots thought."

"It does look bad," agreed Plummer.

Then, squaring his shoulders he added:

"Well, if Romaine and the others bungled it then it's for them to settle if caught. Chris Lowry will stand firm; but it was a mistake for them to take Bill Page in on it. I told Howard that Page was weak. If he's cornered he'll tell everything he knows. They ought to have wiped him out along with the rest."

"Something's going to happen," grumbled Ives. "I feel it. I never felt it before."

"Nothing can happen to us," protested Plummer.

"You're the boss," said Ives. "I've done my part. I've fetched the word ahead of the stage. I didn't want you to be taken by surprise."

"You're the coolest one in the gang, George. If ever we have to quit this place on the jump you and I will ride for it alone. Now you circulate around the town and tell the fellows to clear out. Dempsey's and the Rattlesnake will be safe enough. If any move is made to hitch us up with it I'll get word to both ranches in time for you all to scatter; but I can't see how they can fix anything on us."

"Romaine worked two months for Magruder as his cook. Page took care of his livestock. The other boys acted as clerks. They weren't mixed up in any of the stage-line work. No, George, there isn't a thing to show we had any hand in it."

"Not until Page is caught and squeals," was the ominous reminder.

"He mustn't be allowed to squeal. If the boys haven't done for him already they will act the minute there's any danger of their being rounded up. If by any chance he comes back to this side of the range and is accused I'll turn him off in short order. This country is growling for a hanging. I'll give it one. I'm the sheriff."

"I'll pass the word to the boys and ride back. I shall stick to Bannack City to catch any new word that's brought in. I suppose Colonel Sanders is still here."

Plummer's brows came down in a frown.

"Yes, he is. He'll make a rare row when he hears the news. I wish he was on his way back to Bannack. Good-by."

They parted, and Plummer walked toward the Virginia Hotel. On his way he met "Red" Yeager, who sometimes handled the bar trade at the Rattlesnake Ranch. The sheriff paused long enough to say:

"— is loose, or will be the minute the stage comes in. Pass the word for the boys to clear out to Dempsey's and the Rattlesnake."

"What's up?"

"Magruder and the others have been found."

"Godfrey! They've only been gone two weeks. Must have been awful poor work."

"Couldn't have been worse. But get along and pass the word."

"What about you?"

"I'll face the music if there is any. I'll organize a posse. If there isn't some one to act as leader when the stage comes in it'll all blow over in a day or two. I'll have some of the outside men come in with news of a new find. When the town's crazy

about a new strike it hasn't time to bother with anything else."

"You got a head on you, chief," said Yeager admiringly as he turned away to spread the alarm.

Plummer strolled on to the gambling-shack and was pleased to note that already several of the men were leaving the town. He came to a halt, pretending interest in the games and was thus engaged when Colonel Wilbur Fisk Sanders, one of Bannack City's prominent citizens, joined him.

The two were old acquaintances, reckoning time by the life of the two chums. Colonel Sanders and his family had been Plummer's guests on the preceding Thanksgiving Day in Bannack City.

"How's the work going, colonel?" Plummer greeted him.

"Pretty fair. Not so much enthusiasm as I had hoped for, yet every one agrees that everything in Idaho Territory east of the Rockies and the Bitterroot Range ought to be set off as a new Territory. It'll go through all right. No opposition. Only trouble is most of the men here plan on getting out once they have made their fortunes.

"They can't see anything but gold and silver," the colonel continued, "and they reckon that they will be exhausted. They can't see crops and farms and ranches and permanent towns. But it'll go through all right. Sheriff, it's necessary for me to start for Bannack at once and leave the other two on the committee to keep up the work. I wish you would push it along."

Plummer turned his head to hide the tell-tale glitter in his eyes. He had been worried over Colonel Sanders' presence in the town. A born leader of men, the colonel was one to strike at the root of any trouble, and he knew no fear when committed to a cause. With him out of town before the stage arrived he might not hear the gruesome news until he reached Bannack. The excitement in Virginia City when the stage-coach driver shouted the news of the murders would be explosive, and like all explosions would subside quickly.

"I'll push it hard, colonel," promised the sheriff. "Western Idaho doesn't know we're on earth. We're part of the Territory only in name. I'll work up sentiment for it."

"Good. Now I'll get my horse and be off. If Sam Hausser comes in from Biven's tell him I must see him before he starts back for St. Louis. He'll find me at Bannack."

Plummer promised to convey this message to the miner and resumed watching the games, but kept an eye on the street to check off those members of the gang who were unostentatiously leaving town.

Plummer knew that Ives had far outdistanced the stage and that it would be some time before the news was brought to the gulch, and yet he began to fear that any moment the coach would rock down the street with the driver hoarsely shouting how Magruder and his four friends had been foully murdered.

The sheriff ceased noting the departure of his men in his anxiety to behold Colonel Sanders riding away. If only the crest of public resentment would pass before a leader could seize the occasion and initiate a movement to round up all undesirables the sheriff would be in no danger. He felt an immense relief when he saw the colonel cantering down the street.

Suddenly discovering that his nerves had been under a severe strain, he decided to seek an anodyne at the hotel bar. He was disgruntled to meet Red Yeager again.

"I won't answer for your neck, Red, if you're here when the stage comes in," he warned.

"It's the Spaniard. I've been trying to git him away. He's fighting drunk and won't leave town."

"Then let the fool take what's brought to him," said Plummer. "Let him stay and pay, if there's anything to pay. But you find your horse and ride. There's nothing the Spaniard can tell. At least I'll see he doesn't have a chance if he's jumped."



YEAGER lost no time in departing. Plummer continued toward the hotel, pausing for a genial word with merchant, miner and gambler, and all but collided with the Spaniard, who staggered as he attempted to swagger down the street. The peaked hat was pushed back, and the black eyes, heavily lidded, stared malignantly at Plummer, then glittered in ferocious merriment as he recognized him.

"The grand *señor*," he greeted, sweeping off his hat with exuberant politeness. "Another man would have felt my knife for brushing against me."

And he waved his hand gracefully at the passing groups. In excellent English, albeit his tongue was thick from drink, he boasted: "They run from me. They hide."

"You poor fool!" grated Plummer. "You're playing with death. Get out of town and sober up."

"That is a very bad talk to make to me, the 'First of the Spaniards,'" purred the fellow.

Plummer's hand dropped to a gun.

"It's no time to swap words. Get your horse and don't stop riding till you make the herder's hut at Dempsey's."

"Bah! These men here are sheep. They step aside. They give me much room. I own the world."

And he fondly patted the butts of two revolvers, lavishly inlaid with silver, and the haft of a murderous knife, all worn in a gay red belt under the short, embroidered jacket.

"I tell you for the last time you'll get no help from me if you stay here and get into trouble," Plummer quietly warned him. "There is a word coming that will turn this street into a mob. It will be very bad for any one who has been crowding men aside."

The Spaniard grinned in drunken egotism and swaggered on. The sheriff loitered near the hotel so that he might be on hand when the stage came in to note the effect of the news.



DOWN in Beidler's cabin Jack Oliver, owner of the Salt Lake City stage-line, was holding an earnest interview with Beidler.

"Cyrus Skinner is hand and glove with Plummer and has hatched up lots of deviltry in his saloon at Hellsgate. His woman Nellie was on the coach two weeks ago, and she was feeling ugly toward Skinner. Bill Rumsey was driving, and he egged her on until she began to tell things.

"Then she must 'a' got scared at what she'd been saying, and she begged Tom not to say anything. Said Skinner would kill her if he knew she'd been talking. Reckon he would at that."

"Colonel Sanders is keen to clean up the two towns. He'll answer for Bannack City if we'll answer for Virginia City and Nevada," remarked Beidler.

"People think Sanders is up here just to serve on the committee of three to arrange for us to be set off from Idaho as a new territory," Oliver observed. "Has he said anything to you about Plummer?"

"Not a word, nor I to him," answered Beidler. "You know what I believe. The

colonel will come around to the same way of thinking some day. When something breaks loose and arouses the whole gulch then it 'll be time enough for the colonel and the others to come out into the open. I feel it in my bones that *something* will break before snow flies. I've felt it so strong I've stuck close to town when I wanted to be riding north in search of young Beach Content."

"The young man who plugged Baldy and the Wild Cat," Oliver commented. "Good stuff in him. I thought he was with Holter in Ramshorn Gulch."

"He was, but he started for the Prickly Pear Valley with Old Misery, an old trapper. He was to return in two weeks and look for my signal smoke. I'd arranged with Holter to make three smokes each day after the two weeks were up if it was all right for him to return. Holter's made the smokes, but neither Content or Old Misery have shown up. I'm getting worried.

"Easy enough to explain that. Either Old Misery has dogged him off to moon around in the mountains, or else the Indians have got the two of them. Hope not the last. I'd like to have him drive for me. I believe he would give the road-agents a fight before handing over the express. Don't think he'd be tempted into wandering about. Probably the Indians got him."

"Don't!" growled Beidler. "I like him. I can't bear to think of the Injuns getting him. And he'd never go rambling about to see the country. He's too keen to earn some money before his father and sister return next Spring."

They shifted the conversation to other matters and had talked for an hour or more when a loud yell on the street distracted their attention. They might have accepted it as being the exuberance of some drunken prospector had it not been caught up by hundreds of tanned throats.

"Some big war news! North and South will be fighting in front of the hotel!" cried Beidler, reaching for his big white hat.

The volume increased as the two stepped from the cabin. Down the street and near the hotel was a crowd of men. Men and a few women were running from all directions, further congesting the street. Over the heads of the swiftly increasing gathering rose the top of the Salt Lake City coach, just in from Bannack, with Will Rumsey, one of the partners, on the driver's seat.

"Maybe it's happened already, Jack!" cried Beidler as he made sure his two guns were loose.

Oliver lowered on the gesticulating crowd and complained:

"We've been held up again, I suppose. It's so common a happening I don't understand why the people should get hot over it. I must see just what is the matter."

Beidler trotted along beside him. They reached the edge of the crowd and worked their way through it to the heads of the leaders.

"Held up again, Bill?" called out Oliver.

Rumsey waved a greeting and replied:

"More wonderful than that, Jack. Came through with nary a hold-up!"

Some one laughed at this attempt at humor, but the general mood was grimly ominous. Oliver stared at Rumsey in bewilderment; and the latter seriously explained:

"I've just been telling the news, Jack. Lloyd Magruder, Charley Allen, Will Phillips, Bob and Horace Chalmers, have been murdered. Their bodies were found in the Bitterroot Range about a hundred and fifty miles from Bannack. The murderers made moccasin-tracks in the snow to throw it on to the Injuns, but the dead men's guns have been found. On a small prairie near by the bodies of twenty-four mules and seven horses, all shot, were found. No Indian would destroy property like that."

A yell set off the explosion of hate; and for a minute the enraged audience screamed and howled and shouted terrible threats. Beidler swarmed up into the driver's seat with the agility of a cat and waved his big hat for silence. Those close to the coach became mute, and by degrees the whole assemblage quieted down.

"Who was with Magruder and his friends?" asked Beidler of Rumsey, speaking loudly for the benefit of the citizens.

"Doc Howard and Jim Romaine!" shouted a dozen voices before Rumsey could answer.

"Bill Page and Chris Lowry!" roared another dozen.

"Cyus Skinner! Cy Skinner!" howled a score.



SHERIFF PLUMMER elbowed his way through the crowd and climbed up so as to stand on the hub of the wheel; and the moment he could make himself heard he bellowed:

"The first four men are the ones we want. They worked for Magruder in his Wallace Street store for the two months he was here. Skinner wasn't with them at all. He's been in town here since they left. He's at his Hellsgate place now.

"I'm raising a posse to take up the trail. I've sent a rider to Bannack City to raise men there. From this town I want five good horsemen who know how to shoot and who ain't afraid of any sneaking murderers. I'll give five hundred dollars, gold, out of my own pocket for the head of any of the four men who were with the Magruder party. I believe that Virginia City will give five hundred for each of the other three."

"We'll give a thousand!" yelled Kessler, who was still wearing his baker's apron.

"A thousand! A thousand for a head!" caught up the crowd.

"I'll give five hundred dollars, gold, to Sheriff Plummer for every murderer he hangs, up to twenty!" shouted Jack Oliver.

Plummer dropped back to the ground and began calling the names of those he wanted to ride with him. Nor did he call on any one whose reputation was in the least besmirched. As the sheriff bustled away to get his horse and the men he had summoned began working clear of the crowd Beidler descended and stood beside Oliver and muttered:

"He means it, I think. They can't be active members of the gang. And he'll surely hang them if he catches them."

"Then he'll hang them before he brings them to town," said Oliver. "He'll hang them or shoot them down before they can talk. I tell you they're old members of his gang, and that Skinner planned the whole business. Skinner's too cunning to be actively mixed up in it, but his woman Nellie dropped enough for me to know he's mighty smart at planning deviltry for others to carry out."

Beidler's cheerful countenance grew somber as he asked—

"Is there any chance of the posse overtaking them?"

"Not this side of —," was the savage reply. "By this time the four have passed Lewiston and are on their way to the coast. By the time we can send a man to Lewiston and get word to Hill Beachy they'll be snugly hid up in San Francisco."

"Magruder and Beachy were old friends," mused Beidler. "They can't hide up from

him even in San Francisco. But we ought to make sure about Skinner and get him if he was in it."

Plummer and his five horsemen galloped from the town, and their departure was wildly cheered. But there were some on the street that day who remained silent because of their conviction that the sheriff was in league with the criminal organization.

Merchants returned to their stores, miners completed their errands and started for their claims, and the gamblers went back to sleep against the demands of a wakeful night. By all surface indications the town was normal and like a hundred other mining-camps. And yet in the heart of miner and merchant, in the hearts of the women and the children, was the weight of the shadow.

Even the gamblers felt grave doubts gnawing at their fatalistic minds. For what profited it if they won fortunes on the green cloth if it were impossible for them to take their winnings back to the world? The murder of the Magruder party was a "no-thoroughfare" warning.

A prospector in Kessler's barroom cautiously confided to the bartender:

"If we strike it rich and stick in town we'll lose everything. There was Gold Dick. If we get our dust together and try to take it out of the country we lose. There was Magruder and his friends."

"Cheer up and live honest. Better times are coming," said the bartender encouragingly, and he rubbed and polished and wondered what progress his friend Beidler had made in certain directions.

The prospector edged down the bar as the Spaniard entered and lurched forward and demanded:

"Whisky, gringo. There's a fire in me. Hellfire. Put it out with good whisky before it burns you."

And the black eyes glared truculently at the man in the apron.

Calmly and with no sign of haste the bartender set down a bottle and glass and continued rubbing the bar with his left hand, his right hanging at his side and out of sight of the drink-crazed desperado.

The prospector stared in fascination at the drunken man and ignored the bartender's scowling glance and jerk of the head which advised him to depart quietly. With a mouthful of Spanish oaths the Spaniard uncorked the bottle and, disdaining the

glass, allowed the fiery liquor to gurgle down his brown throat, his half-closed eyes watching the bartender. He swallowed half a pint of the liquor and then banged the bottle on the bar and with an evil grin defied—

"I have no gold, gringo."

The bartender's face continued expressionless. He only invited—

"Have some more?"

The Spaniard shook his head, his eyes growing cunning.

"You want me drunk. I am not a fool. I will drink no more."

With a curt nod of approval the bartender picked up the bottle and threw it into a half-barrel of waste beneath the bar. The Spaniard's face grew livid as he vaguely suspected the insult intended by the action.

"Why you do that?" he grated.

"You drank from the bottle. Who wants to drink after *you*?" quietly asked the bartender.

For ten or twelve seconds the Spaniard remained motionless while the bartender's meaning seeped to the bottom of his sodden mind. Then with a cat-like waul he reached for his red belt. Up came the bartender's right hand from below the bar, it held a Colt forty-four.

"Vamoose, you dog!" he softly advised. "You *sabe* that? Git out!"



THE Spaniard slowly withdrew his hand from the belt and ran his tongue out over his lips. The muzzle of the forty-four was very impelling. There were none of the gang present, only the nervous prospector at the end of the bar.

The prospector was afraid of what yet might happen, and it was fear that caused him to laugh hysterically. The Spaniard slowly swept his gaze about and stared at him, then tossed his head and staggered to the door. He did not look back, and as he disappeared the bartender dropped the revolver on its little shelf.

"He's bad, but even a bad greaser can't crowd me only about so far," said the bartender.

The prospector gave a yell of fright. The bartender jerked his head about in time to behold half of the peaked hat, half of the swarthy, wicked face, and one arm and hand showing in the doorway; and the hand held a gun. With an oath the bartender dodged

below the bar and grabbed his weapon. The Spaniard, defeated in his purpose and yet insistent on scoring a kill, shifted the gun to one side and shot the prospector through the head.

The man fell, dead before he struck the floor. The bartender popped up ready for action. But by this time the murderer was in the street. Vaulting over the bar, the bartender ran to the door. The Spaniard was running swiftly down the street. Only when compelled by a group of citizens to slow up did he reel and stagger.

"The Spaniard! Stop him! He just murdered 'Lucky' Ewin in our place!" yelled the bartender.

His voice carried above the street noises. The Spaniard's frantic attempt at flight attracted attention to him. A leg was thrust forward, and he went down in the sand. Before he could secure a weapon, let alone crawl to his feet, he was covered by several men who fell upon him and held his legs and arms.

"Fetch a rope! Fetch a rope!" hoarsely bawled a red-faced miner. "By. —! We'll make a beginning right now!"

There was confusion and much yelling of orders, but the men on the ground held their prisoner fast. At last a coil of rope fell like a snake on the struggling group. One man worked clumsily but desperately and finally yelled in triumph and jumped to his feet.

"Stand clear!" some one shouted. "He's got him! Rope's round his neck! T' others got the devil's guns and knife. Every one stand clear!"

The prostrate mass began to disintegrate. The Spaniard, violently assisted, got on his feet, one hand clawing at his empty belt, the other clutching at the rope, his black eyes bulging with fear and from the pressure on his wind-pipe.

"To the corral! The hotel corral!" some one shouted.

The cry was caught up, and a dozen hands seized the rope, and down the street ran the men. The victim, unsteady from drink, managed to run for a few rods, using both hands to secure some slack on the rope. Then he fell and threw out his hands to save himself. The noose tightened. The men did not cease running, and the man was dead before he had been dragged two rods.

Beidler saw the whooping crowd advancing, and as the executioners drew near he

discerned the inanimate bundle jerking and bobbing along the ground. It was so covered with dirt and dust that he did not identify it until he glimpsed the red belt. Jack Oliver cried over his shoulder:

"They've got the Spaniard! He killed Lucky Ewin in cold blood at Kessler's! It's the beginning of the vigilants!"

"It's clearing the way for the vigilants, but it's only a mob," corrected Beidler. "The rat deserved death, but when the vigilants come they will act without hurrahing, and each man shall have a hearing and will be hung in due form and at once after he's been found guilty. Lucky none of the gang was on hand, or they might have discouraged it. Now the men have tasted blood and learned their power they'll want to make a clean sweep.

"But the spell won't last. What we must have is cool, deliberate purpose—not excitement. But it's all coming."

The truth of his words was shown after the corral was reached and the frantic mob discovered that their victim was dead. The limp body was hung up, and the leaders ran whooping up the street in search of other offenders.

Finding the town strangely empty of undesirable characters, the men's enthusiasm began to wane. Some remembered that they had business to attend to, and that the outlaws had long and vindictive memories. Miners who were in town for supplies hastened to finish their buying and get back to their diggings.

Some one cut down and removed the Spaniard's body, and no one was curious to ask who did it. The red-faced man, warmly praised at first as the leader of the mob, found his admirers dropping away from him. And this defection was not because of jealousy but from fear that the leader's friends would be classed with him in any vengeance planned by the dead man's pals.

When the leader realized he no longer had a following, that he was being avoided, a vague uneasiness took possession of his usually stout heart. It was the unseen he dreaded—the shot from the darkness or the knife in the back. The shadow lay heavily upon him. Without bothering to buy the supplies he had come to town to procure he mounted his horse and rode back to Biven's Gulch. The street was unusually quiet an hour after the Spaniard died.



IF ANY of the citizens of Alder Gulch had imagined that the lynching was to teach the lawless element a lesson the passing days were to prove the fallacy of any such belief. Not only was the local coach to Bannack robbed on both the down and up trip, but Oliver's Salt Lake City coaches were held up both coming and going.

Beidler shrewdly read in these activities the band's purpose of warning Virginia City, Nevada and Bannack to bow before the inevitable and pay toll, and not to assume that the death of one ruffian could halt the larcenies of the band. A man was found killed near Biven's Gulch, and the miners from those diggings would not venture to ride to town unless in a body.

Some of the citizens believed that the road-agents were unusually busy because of the sheriff's absence with his posse. The greater number, however, logically reasoned that the gang was methodically making the most of the dying season, just as the miners were bestirring themselves to clean up their diggings before the snow came.

If the death of the Spaniard taught the people that they as well as the road-agents could kill, it did not lessen the fear of the shadow. If anything it lay heavier and thicker than ever over the land. Those men who had made their pile and were anxious to devise some way of safely conveying their gold out of the country, scarcely knew what to do.

To remain in Virginia City through the Winter with no guarantee that Spring travel would be more favorable, was maddening. With the game won it irked them to the point of homesickness to be bottled up on Alder Creek or in Bannack City.

Nor would their treasure be safe in the towns. Gold Dick's death and many other homicides had proven that.

One man who found himself studiously avoided was Kessler's bartender. He had started the pursuit of the Spaniard. Aside from Beidler and a few others there were none who wished to be seen in his company. That the bar continued to draw trade was due to two factors; the community's thirst was strong and enduring, and it was human nature to wish to witness the vengeance of the gang.

The bartender, thinner of face and with eyes that were ever searching each man who approached the bar, lost his wizardry of

serving many customers. This slowing-up of his technique resulted from his disinclination to turn his back unless he knew only harmless men stood at the bar, and from the additional fact that he kept his right hand under his apron much of the time and did the bar work with his left. The Colt revolver was to be detected where it made a bulge in the apron, and it was obvious that he was wearing it through the suspender straps and high above the hip. His hand seldom left the butt of the gun when the room was filled with promiscuous company.

"They're waiting to get me," he told Beidler one afternoon when the two were alone. "I see them wink at each other when they come in here. If I didn't sleep here and seldom or never step outdoors they'd 'a' had me before now. It's getting me. I don't sleep nights."

"You quit talking and thinking that way," Beidler reassured him. "You'll live to see most of them dancing on air."

After this talk with the bartender Beidler traveled to Nevada City and back several times and then journeyed to Bannack and held secret consultations with several citizens. Among these was Colonel Sanders, who was greatly wrought up over the Magruder murders, and who urged an instant reprisal on the outlaws.

But Beidler remained calm and advised against any hasty action. To these lovers of law and order he invariably said:

"When the people get really tired of it, when the miner can forget his diggings long enough to pitch it and help us clean house, then we will start. It's all in our hands and the cure is simple; but we must not begin until we are prepared to finish it."

Plummer and his five honest riders returned from the Bitterroot Range and reported no progress. Some of the citizens in Virginia City professed to believe that Indians were responsible for the massacre, but this was more because they wished to believe that instead of attributing the crime to the lengthening shadow. The fact that the remains of none of the suspects were found made the Indian theory untenable. If they were the fortunate survivors of an Indian attack they had failed to report the tragedy at any settlement in the Boise Basin. Then came word from Lewiston that the four murderers had put up at the Hotel de France in that town on the night

of October nineteenth, had registered under the names of "Smith, Brown, Perkins and Clark," and had taken the stage at the Luna House stage-office on the next morning. Their identity, however, had not been established until after their departure, and then because Hill Beachy, the stage-line promoter, had recognized the mules abandoned by the murderers as some of those belonging to his friend Magruder.

Gradually the excitement died down as it was realized that the wretches had had time to reach the coast, even Mexico. Those characters who had hastened to the Rattlesnake and Dempsey ranches drifted back to Bannack and Virginia to gamble and carouse with the gold recently obtained in stage hold-ups. Virginia City found itself in a deeper groove of fear, and the lawless carried their heads high and conducted themselves more brutally than ever, and with even more disregard of public opinion.

Sheriff Plummer rode much in pursuit of wrong-doers but was continually arriving too late to pick up a warm trail. Insignificant malefactors were caught. Some were whipped and some were banished. Some were marked for the scaffold could the sheriff have had his way, but because their history heretofore was not nefarious the miners' court allowed them to go.

When the insolence of the villains was fast becoming unbearable even to those men who were selfishly inclined to ignore crimes against a neighbor so long as they themselves were left unmolested, a boy left a message at Beidler's cabin. Beidler found it thrust under the door when he returned at dusk. It was written on the back of an express receipt-form and said:

I'm afraid, X. They're coming for me. I'm afraid.—From Kessler's.

"The poor — has lost his nerve entirely at last," sighed Beidler as he left the cabin and hurried to Kessler's.

His ears were strained to catch the sound of gunshots or the cries of men who had witnessed a murder; but to his great relief he found the bar nearly deserted. The bartender, his eyes very bright as if from fever, was on duty, one hand under his apron. He turned a glaring gaze as Beidler gained the door, then leaned limply against the bar as he beheld the big white hat and the cheerful face of his friend.

"Boy said no one was at home," he whis-

pered as Beidler jauntily came up to the bar. "Lord! But I was hoping and hoping——"

He broke off and poured himself out a stiff drink. Beidler's hand closed over the glass, and, gently removing it, he threw the liquor on the floor and warned:

"None of that. When a man who's had the guts to go after the Spaniard and do the other things you've done takes to drinking bar whisky to brace his nerves he'd better look down the barrel of his own gun. Now tell me what's up!"

The bartender leaned forward, his wide eyes ever on the door, and in a whisper explained:

"A young Mexican boy—youngster I'd been decent to—sneaked in this morning. He came from Dempsey's. Works with the herders. They was drunk and whipped him unmercifully. He walked all the way here to tell me what he heard them planning.

"They agreed that Whisky Bill, Alex Carter and Texas Bob, all having Bannack for their stamping-grounds, should come here tonight and git me. All the roughs living here was to keep clear of the barroom until it was over. After I'd been shot full of holes the three were to ride south with Sheriff Plummer and a posse of his own men after them. Plummer was to come back and say they'd taken to the mountains and that he lost the trail in the darkness."

"The boy may have been mistaken or might have wanted to stir up the people against them to square off the whipping they gave him."

"No. He wanted to do me a good turn. And there hasn't been one of the town toughs in here since middle afternoon. And those that came in were polite as a piece of pie. Never a whisper or a wink or any sly threats. A stranger would think they was all as peaceful as so many sheep."

Beidler glanced at the three men at the end of the bar. They were all reputable citizens. He walked down to them and said—

"Boys, I'd be much obliged if you dust out and keep your mouths shut about seeing me in here."

"That's enough for all us, X. Nary a bleat," said one, and the three promptly departed.

Beidler walked behind the bar, cleared a

place under it and removed his hat. The bartender eyed him wonderingly and with more confidence in his face. Beidler sat down on the floor and drew his two guns, saying:

"They won't try any window shooting. They'll be more or less drunk and want to have some fun out of it. When they enter the door you give a yell as if scared and drop behind the bar."

"What else?"

"That's all, except when you strike the floor get well under the bar. I'll do the rest."

"By heavens, X! Just seeing you has done me good. I ain't such a white-livered coward as you're thinking. You just clear out and leave it to me. They may get me, but I'll take some company across with me," earnestly declared the bartender.

"Three to one, and you wouldn't have a ghost of a chance. Do as I say. And we'll hope they won't be long in coming. If any honest men drop in tell them there may be trouble here and that I said for them to clear out and keep shut. Never knew before what an advantage it was to be undersized."

And he drew up his knees and composed himself to the tedious work of waiting.



THIRTY minutes passed. Several citizens entered, but quickly left after the bartender had whispered to them. Beidler changed his position to lie on his side, but quickly shifted when he heard loud laughter and scuffling steps.

He bowed his head to accommodate his big hat and picked up his two guns. The steps stamped up to the doorway, and the door was thrown violently open. The bartender took one glance at the inflamed face of Whisky Bill, who was in the lead, and with a sharp yell dropped to the floor.

Whisky Bill rested his hands on his hips and threw back his head to indulge in a mighty guffaw. Alex Carter, more quiet and deadly, glided toward the end of the bar to peer behind it. Texas Bob, a braggart and a mighty man when in the company of the inoffensive, strode forward and loudly ordered—

"Come up out of that, you white-livered dog."

Carter ceased his advance and waited for the bartender to show his head, intending

to play a rare joke on Texas Bob by shooting the man the minute he appeared. Whisky Bill, although on murder bent, was for temporizing long enough to make the victim serve them with liquor.

"Come out of that afore I jump that bar and tickle you with twelve inches of cold steel!" bawled Texas Bob.

There was a sound behind the bar, and then a big white hat bobbed up, and under the hat was the cheerful countenance of Beidler. The astounded trio were incapable of making a motion as they stared stupidly at the round face beneath the big hat and observed the two big guns resting on the bar and covering them. The metamorphosis was entirely beyond their comprehension.

"Just what do you loud-voiced scum want?" quietly asked Beidler.

"A—a drink," faltered Whisky Bill.

"We don't serve drinks to drunken thieves. And you, Carter and Texas, hear this: Never come in here again. I'll shoot the three of you on sight. Better still, don't come to Virginia City again. I would shoot you now if we hadn't arranged to hang you a little later. Just to show you what dirty cowards you are I'm coming out there with my guns in my belt. There are three of you. At least one ought to manage to draw and plug me."

With that Beidler shoved his guns back into his belt and gave them an excellent opportunity to draw when he raised both hands to settle his big hat more securely on his head. But by the time he had walked to the end of the bar the three were hurrying through the doorway.

Beidler's seeming carelessness instantly vanished. He cried to the bartender—

"Keep down!"

Then he ran to the door and made sure none of the scoundrels was trying to shoot through the window. But they had no desire to tarry and were making for their horses.

The bartender resumed his duties with a new heart. He no longer feared the gang. He had seen one man frighten them away. He was profuse in his gratitude to Beidler. An hour after Beidler had departed Sheriff Plummer strolled in and glanced curiously at the bartender. He noted the composure of the man, also the fact that he was using both hands in serving the customers.

"Man on street was saying you had a little trouble in here," he lazily remarked as he poured a drink.

"Nothing like that. Three toughs came in, but X happened to be here and he shoosed them away," carelessly explained the bartender.

"Next time they come in to bother you just fill them up with lead," advised the sheriff, his expression suddenly becoming very savage.

"Just what I'm going to do," the bartender quietly assured him. "Only I sha'n't wait for them to bother me. I'll shoot on sight. They understand. Have another?"



IT WAS soon after this episode that Beidler's nerves received a severe shock. Two prospectors arrived from the Crow Creek Valley and brought with them a blanket which they had found wrapped around a dead man buried under some brush. The general description, so far as wounds and mutilations permitted, answered closely to that of Beach Content. The blanket in itself was conclusive evidence, for the name "Beach Content" was stitched along the hem.

Beidler stared long and sadly at the blanket. He knew he was gazing on the needlework of Josette Content, and he could not believe that a stranger had gained possession of the blanket. He winced from the task of sending the sad intelligence on to Salt Lake City, but it would be too cruel to allow father and sister to return in the Spring and learn the news.

As his sorrow continued his anger mounted. He talked a second time with the prospectors. The mutilations pointed to the redman's work, but he believed these gruesome clues to be of the same class as the moccasin-tracks left behind by the Magruder murderers. Indian nature remained unchanged. No warrior would bother to bury a victim even under a brush pile. No Indian would leave behind a good blanket.

What did puzzle him was the disappearance of Old Misery. He could only assume that the mountain-man had been seized with the lust to wander and that Beach had refused to accompany him. Old Misery had refused to return to the mining camp, Beidler reasoned, and the young man had attempted to make the trip alone.

Holter was deeply affected by the news. He sent a party of men to Crow Creek to look for additional clues and to reinter the body properly and mark the grave. The return of these men threw no new light on

the tragedy. They were unanimous in declaring it to be the work of Indians. Beidler, remembering the blanket, could not agree to this verdict. However, he did not talk about it, believing perhaps that it would be less of a shock to Content senior and the girl if they thought nameless warriors instead of cold-blooded white murderers had slain the young man.

The return of Colonel Sanders to Virginia City forced Beidler's thoughts into other channels and did him good. The colonel at the outset of their conversation declared:

"This has gone far enough. I have six men in Bannack City who will stand behind me as one man. If we hope to be set off as a new Territory in the Spring we must clean out the rogues and show ourselves to be worthy. The time for waiting and paltering has passed. The day for the strong hand is here. We must make a beginning very soon."

"We can't begin too early to suit me," agreed Beidler. "There's no point in waiting for more murders to be committed. We know where to begin; Carter, Long John, Texas Bob—any one of several score. Some of them will squeal and give us valuable information. Hilderman will tell everything he knows if he feels a noose around his neck. Red Yeager will tell everything, and he can tell more than old man Hilderman.

"We'll be ready to strike when Bannack is ready. And I have a stanch half-dozen men in Nevada City who are growing very impatient. Once we show our hand other honest citizens will flock in, and we'll wipe the board clean."

"There must be no mob rule," insisted Sanders. "It must all be deliberately done in cool blood and with regular hearings. Only in that way can we make them understand it's something more than a flare of anger.

"The Spaniard's death has taught them nothing. They believe he was choked to death because he killed openly when none of the gang was on hand to help him escape. If anything the Spaniard's death has made them worse."

"We'll wind up by hanging Plummer himself."

"You think that?"

Sanders was somewhat taken back.

"Of course I've heard the stories about him," he went on, "but there's nothing

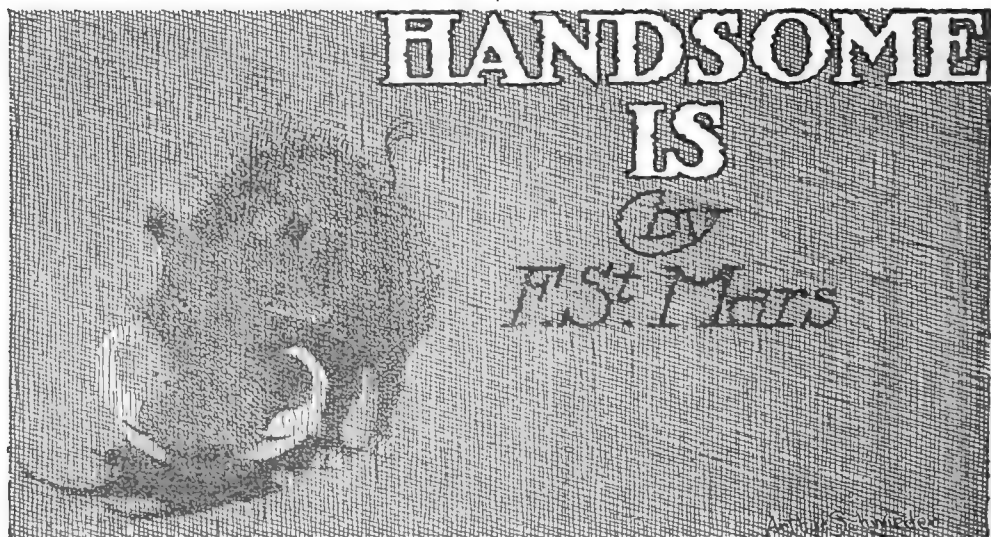
definite yet to connect him with the crimes. I've felt that he was helpless, or thought he was, so long as the citizens as a body didn't stand behind him."

"I'll go farther," passionately prophesied Beidler. "Until he is hung we won't make a beginning. When he is hung the whole organization will crumble to pieces."

"Then he shall surely hang the minute we secure evidence against him," declared Sanders.

And that very day the Bannack City coach was held up and robbed of three thousand dollars, and a man on a small milk ranch near Dempsey's was murdered for a few hundred dollars in dust.

TO BE CONCLUDED



Author of "A Beast of No Account," "Rough Justice," etc.

IT WAS very dark in the mimosa thickets. Even the lion, with his wonderful cat's eyes, could not feel certain what the shadow that moved—as distinct from the shadows that did not, and those that seemed to—might be. He analyzed the wind, but it had changed and begun to blow the wrong way *after* he had entered his ambush. Hearing was out of the question; the shadow was as dumb as any other shadow. Finally the lion, who was young, and whose hunting luck had been spoiled by the conical moon for half a week, chanced it. Being a lion, he probably thought he could. Any other beast would not have dared.

Three heavy thuds and a growl, calculated to make the floor of one's inside fall out, announced the fact that the king of beasts had moved from his ambush to the shadow—a stop-watch would have timed the complete offensive at almost exactly one second from "zero."

All the same, the shadow was not there when Leo was, if one may so put it, and he managed only to graze the same with one paw lightly—for a lion.

The shadow acknowledged receipt with an explosion of snorts, and whirled about, thus giving away the identity of its tribe. Only a member of the plucky and peppery pig tribe would have acted thus in face of such a foe. And at that moment the moonlight glinted upon the tips of well-kept tusks to prove it.

The lion's second spring seemed but a continuation of the first, but in the same moment it seemed as if a live shell had been fired through the "bush" behind him, low, boring, and swift; and—mark this well—if there is anything cats loathe more than another it is having unknown and rapidly agitated bodies moving with speed and noise in their rear. Even Leo himself is not proof against this.

The lion double-bucked in mid-air, landed

back upon the same spot he had started from (this trick deserved applause) and wrenched himself right about face—all in one slick, smooth, unbroken movement, and in not much more than one second of time.

Followed the gleam of a double pair of tusks, so big and so curved that one wondered where on earth their owner could find room to wear them. The lion said, "Agg-g-g-g-hh!" deep down in his chest once; and again, "A-a-rrr-g-g-h!" as he realized that the first awful utterance had not worked the bluff, and it became necessary for him to side-step round a thorn-bush, or— But not for that king. He side-stepped without shame.

Indeed, with tusks to the rear of him, and tusks to the unknown front of him, what else could he do? Even a king may be pardoned for refusing to engage when so completely outflanked as that.

But if growls alone could win a battle, then the enemy forces opposed to him ought not to have won. They were enough to freeze the marrow, those growls, for the great cat tribe are the biggest bluffers in the world, and the lion's growls, plus his awful aspect, are almost his most valuable asset.

This time, however, they did not work. He was up against pig, the most matter-of-fact people in the wild, and the hardest to bluff. The enemy force retreated, it's true. He could see them, dark blotches in the darker gloom; but whenever the moon showed anything at all it showed that they retreated face to the foe.

Step by step, back and back, they went; the lion following, flat to the ground, looking for an opening, and making the earth fairly rock with his thunderous threatenings. Step by step still, they retreated, impervious or oblivious to the appalling thorns of the place, up to an ant-hill eight feet high, round another ant-hill, back from this a little way, and then—nowhere!

They had backed each down an ant-bear's roomy burrow.

There was a long pause of silence all through the bush after the lion had given up the search and gone. Then, little by little, the surreptitious rustlings, the stealthy twig-cracking, the crinkly pressing of fallen leaves by invisible feet, the secret pattering, the cautious swishing—all the mysterious business of the wild night folk, began again where it had left off.



DAY came with unbarred arena gates of splendor, and then changed swiftly—for this was the tropics—to dull-gray cloud piled on gray cloud. Not tropical at all, indeed, but just the morning for— There they were! Both happening to appear from their respective holes, or an ant-bear's holes rather, at once. Just the morning for a wart-hog!

Natural history books delight in repeating how the wart-hog is the most hideous beast on earth. But that is a tall order. Wart-hogs are a head, an enormously magnified, night-marified pig's head, swollen and pimpled with magnificent warts, adorned by little red pig's eyes set away up top at one end, and overarched by the most colossal double pair of tusks in all the world of the wild. A barrel-bellied pig's body, topped by a hog-mane, and propped up by sturdy legs, somehow holds the head and tusks up, and a pig's tail adorned with a tuft is stuck on after. And watch that tail. It is the wart-hog's little flag of patriotism, not just any old caudal appendage.

But love is a pretty rogue. One never knows where one has him. He obeys no laws. He turns up in all sorts of unexpected places. He does the most impossible things. He joggles all our "best laid plans" anyway up, and then laughs to see the solemn way we take it.

And love had played a prank upon the old boar wart-hog. He had set his wartiness there in the cold dawn, staring and blinking at his old wife and realizing in the fat porcine heart of him that he loved her all over again. So there was the situation for you, there in the lonely thorn bush and the stark dawn, while the winged mops they call gray lauries cried: "Go away! Go away!" to the lean dawn wind; and a drongo shriek (size of a starling) sang his saga of how to battle with eagles (and illustrated it in act); and the old gnu bulls were calling their herds together with their resounding: "Kwank! Kwank!" and the green ibises were winging overhead calling: "Hadada! Hadada!" as they went; and a rhinoceros somewhere was snorting like a locomotive engine wrestling with a heavy load.

The odd part about it was that the old boar wart-hog—Mr. *Phacochærus æthiopicus* scientifically, if you please—had not seen his mate for quite four months. Not that they had ever actually parted, be it understood. They had just agreed to a

separation for a time; yet even then, his "beat" in the jungle had always joined hers.

He had always remained, if not near, at least thereabout, and he had always kept himself assured that she had not been eaten by lions; consumed by leopards; bitten by snakes; drowned by crocodiles or sudden flood; torn to pieces by wild dogs or warrior ants; turned into bacon by man, or caught measles—oh, yes; that is right too—through living in the holes of ant-bears.

And now he had come back, just turned up—most opportunely, too—when the lion had attacked her as recounted. He always did every year, and as before had—fallen in love with his own mate all over again.

Then, with only a long-drawn "Hoo!" and a rush of a pack of hounds, the wild-dog pack was upon her—up and out of the long grass and the clustered bushes, at full speed, upon her.

One can only conclude that they had seen her alone, and not the boar at all.

In an instant she was cut off, surrounded by a slaving whirl of fiends, and although her tusks were striking—*whEEP—whEEP*—in the heart of the mêlée, she must in a minute be torn to pieces from behind.

The old boar wart-hog was not cut off. He could retire to his hole—or the ant-bear's, that is—to safety. He did nothing of the kind. If the wild dogs—they looked more like leggy hyenas with bushy tails—chose to overlook his statuesque self in their crazy canine excitement—well, that was their funeral, not his.

The old boar wart-hog went clean through the pack at his first rush, as a cannon-shot goes through a crowd, and the lane he left in his wake very much resembled such as the shell might leave.

He whirled about, with his tail "flag" waving, and with the peculiar gait of a rocking-horse, and before a dog could howl, was crashing into the press again, his enormous head sweeping tremendously from side to side—his total fighting weight must have been about two hundred and eighty pounds by the way—till he reached the side of his wife, and whirled about, champing foam and rage, a terrible apparition in the eye of the amazed day.

He faced the crowd. He prepared to charge again. But there was no need. The wild dogs, gibbering like gnomes, growling like dogs, vanished, as they had come, at full speed and without warning

given. Their wounded crawled, limping, in their wake. Their dead remained—two dead; broken and done for—upon the trampled, tawny grass as the sun broke through, and a lark—a real lark—began to buzz—they buzz there—in the sky above. And then the two wart-hogs went away together.



THE air was quite still, as it often is in England at noon; the little sounds could be heard a long way.

A bush cuckoo was bubbling somewhere, hidden, as they usually are, among the mimosas; and a bulbul was playing on his silver flute. Impala antelope, pictures of grace incarnate, were moving about among the dense acacias, browsing silently, except for, now and then, the deep bass grunt of their rams—which seemed to foretell rain.

There was no sign of rain in the brazen brass shield of the sky, however, nor in the heat-flurry dancing above the bushes, nor in the dust-devils capering over the plain. The ground was cracked and scorching to the touch; the grass—what was left of it—crackled like tinder as the herds of zebras trailed in to the shade; and the hum of insects formed a continuous background of sound.

There was a snorting in the underwood, and a sound as of the uprooting of earth, and a smell faintly suggestive of the pigsty.

Then the old boar wart-hog, accompanied by his mate and their family of four funny little fat porkers—they must have been under seven days old, but they were as precocious and active on their fat pins as if they had been seven weeks—came out of the shade and started to feed among the impala and the browsing zebras.

Nobody minded the ugly old pig and his unlovely gang, for everybody knew him to be eminently respectable—that is unless anybody bothered him. If anybody did—well, look out!

Except for a little snuffly snorting neither of the parents made any sound. Indeed they were almost the most silent of all the pig tribe, who are not famed, as a rule, for withholding what they have to say.

They were feeding upon bark, upon the roots of the acacias, which they dug up and which looked rather like fruit, and upon grass. They interfered with nobody; and you can bet nobody in that harmless gathering interfered with them.

Yet it seemed rather strange that they, followers of the night, haunters of the dusk, patrons of dull, clouded days, should be abroad in that sizzling glare—almost like another sign of rain, in fact.

As they fed, the old boar wart-hog, wandering as all pigs do when feeding, became somewhat separated from the rest. But though he could not see them he was never so far away that he could not hear them if they had chosen to call him up with a snort; and moreover he kept always to leeward of his family to make doubly sure. Quick were his hearing and scenting powers, though his eyesight may have been, as is asserted, "C. 3."

Then Fate started to play her pranks again, as she always will, refusing to leave anybody alone, even a respectable old wild pig taking his after-dinner nap. That is to say, a cloud had appeared upon the burning horizon, a tiny cloud, "no bigger than a man's hand." The old boar wart-hog had lain himself down, fat and snuffingly, upon his side, as pigs love to do, and had gone to sleep.

The cloud raced on, performing a miracle as it came, for it grew and grew even while one looked, as an ink-drop grows upon a blotting-pad; and as it grew, its speed increased.

Then came the storm. You could hear it some time before it arrived, a dry, growing roar that swallowed up all other sounds. The wind that ran before it struck the graceful euphorbias, and made them rock; it caught the palms and bent them lashing; set the thorn-trees crashing and scraping; hissed between the teeth of the dry grass; and picked up the dust in clouds and threw it all ways. In a moment, almost, the white-hot sun went out, and the cloud, now nearly overhead and traveling at the speed of an express train, all but covered the sky.

The old boar wart-hog awoke with a grunt. He raised his enormous head. He stared around, and his eyes focused suddenly upon—not the waving trees, not the dust-fog, not the growing dark, but a flash of vivid yellow, foiled by jet spots, in an opening between two thick wait-a-bit bushes. Came too a peculiar yarly, snarly whine. But it was gone again and—the old boar wart-hog was on his short legs instantly.

Not that the pig showed any outward signs of being suspicious beyond that one quick heave on to his neat sharp hoofs.

He was not that sort. He remained quite motionless, big head down, as if feeding, but the little eyes of him were surveying the world sharply behind his tusks and his snout! "worked" hard. His ears, too, twitched; and the tuft of hair on the end of his little, funny, and now stiffly erect tail, was blowing in the wind. The old fellow's war-flag was hoisted, so to speak.



AS A matter of fact, what he had seen was one glimpse—and one glimpse is enough where wild folks are concerned—of the hindquarters of a leopard, creeping in the direction of the wart-hog's family. What more could he need to see? Also the leopard was hungry or he would not be there, and the pig knew that too.

Then he jumped. And with good reason. He had just found himself gazing at a precisely similar yellow streak foiled with jet spots, doing just the same thing in just the same place. So-o! *Felis pardus* was duplicated, was he? There were two of the beggars.

The old boar wart-hog let his odd tail-tuft go so that it fell and bobbed any way, forward or back, though the tail itself remained stiff and straight as a flagstaff. Then he rushed.

The old sow wart-hog was standing, foaming, in the middle of a clearing, and her eyes were like little live coals when her mate arrived. One eye she had, the left one, upon a leopard who, in sinuous bounds, was chasing one of her funny little fat porkers—who was legging it for life straight toward her. The other eye, the right one, held the sinister stare of a second leopard, crouching in the grass.

If she charged either foe, the other would take her from the rear, and death to at least one piglet, not to mention herself, must be the result. There was no sign of the other three baby wart-hogs however; they had clapped down motionless at the first maternal signal of alarm.

And all the time the cloud bellowed overhead like a herd of bulls, and the clearing became darker and darker—except when lightning splashed it—and all the trees went mad together.

Then down came the rain, straight, and pounding upon the baked earth like a thousand kettledrums.

And in that moment out shot the old boar

wart-hog from the bushes, crashing, red-eyed, foam-flecked and terrible, his "battle-flag" waving in the wind. He came bang on to the rap-rap-rapping tail of the crouching, or right-hand, leopard.

Then was seen how all the cats may lose their heads if suddenly surprised. Glancing at the demoniacal warty apparition of the boar, this spotted death dashed toward the sow, lost heart, turned for the cover of its left, realized it was cut off, and spun round to the right—too late.

The old boar wart-hog's right-hand pair of tusks, backed by his two hundred and eighty pounds, caught the leopard fair on the loin, and ripped like razors through skin and flesh to the bone.

The leopard—never African leopard was wounded but it did not charge till slain, surely—whirled upon itself, and closed—a clawed and fanged electrified devil—and the full back-swing of the old wart-hog's fearful strokes crashed into its neck and throat. It fixed like a vice on the hog's shoulder, and his quadruple dental arma-

ment sliced sidewise. Beaten off, the leopard next hurled at him again only to receive the full swing of his heavy head on its chest.

Crushed to the earth, it threw itself upon its back, and ripped and tore like an hundred lancets; but the wart-hog's skin was of the pigskin kind, and he liked the low-fought fight. Then Death, the supreme referee, called the fight off; and the old wart-hog, who had won, staggered to one side, tottery but grim, and alive—certainly alive, for his "battle-flag" waved bravely above his battered tail yet.

And when he had recovered his senses sufficiently to see how fared his mate—there she was, at the base of a tree, with a worried and somewhat out-of-breath leopard, swearing malediction down upon her from up among the branches.

Then the old wart-hog and his mate called up their four little ones and went away side by side—ugly if you will, uncouth, grim; but no cowards, assuredly no cowards, and as true as nickel steel.



Author of "One Lone White Man," "The Courtship of Captain Driscoll," etc.

THE captain brought down his fist with a crack on the starboard taffrail of the poop. His voice was hard, metallic almost, and his eyes glinted coldly from beneath his bushy, white brows. Even his ruffle of

heavy, white mustache seemed to swell and stiffen with his anger.

"I've heard enough excuses. Three times I've told you not to knock the hands about, and three times you've disobeyed me. This is the finish. I'm paying you off in

"The Unforeseen," copyright, 1922, by Albert R. Wetjen.

Apia. Look there! Do you think I'm standing for that sort of thing?"

With a scowl the beefy, heavy-jawed mate swung sullenly round and watched the three kanakas midships lift another from the deck and carry him forward. The injured man was moaning piteously, and the blood trickled from a cut in his temple on to the white planking. The mate swung round again and rasped his unshaven jaw with a dirty-nailed hand.

"The swine was coiling the halliards left-handed, sir," he mumbled in protest and his own defense.

The captain's snort was expressive. He rammed his hands with considerable force into the pockets of his white duck pants and glared. Ten years before he would have struck the other man, but age had taught him control.

"He's a new hand. We only shipped him in Guam. — it, were you never a new hand? Do you know the days of that bucko stuff are past? If I were a younger man I'd thrash you within an inch of your life. Get out of my sight!"

With a suppressed oath the mate strode across the poop and leant against the port rail. He rolled a cigaret with passion-shaken fingers while he brooded over his wrongs, real or fancied. His turn would come, was coming. He would repay the captain in full for having made a fool out of him in front of the crew. The warm trade wind ruffled the matted dark hair of his broad chest, exposed by the unbuttoned front of the blue-cotton shirt he wore, and tugged at the brim of the wide *Fala** hat that drooped over his smoldering dark eyes. He was not a particularly tall man, but he was very broad and stockily built, and from the toes of his rope-soled shoes to the cords of his bull neck, he was suggestive of strength.

The captain glared for a moment at the hunched back of his mutinous mate, and then puffed aft, his hands still thrust in his pockets, his white-covered, peaked cap jammed over his brows, and his determined jaw thrust forward aggressively. He snorted again as meaningly as before, as he entered the stuffy little chart-room that nestled in the end of the saloon-house just forward of the wheel.

The brigantine, *Flying Fish*, was homeward bound. Her holds were heavy with a

miscellaneous cargo, the proceeds of a prosperous trading-voyage; sacked copra, sickly-smelling and sweet; odorous shark's fins, pearl-shell, whalebone; and in the safe below in the captain's cabin, reposed nearly one hundred pounds of carefully collected ambergris, worth perhaps as much as the rest of the cargo put together.

For a trading-vessel the *Flying Fish* was somewhat delicately built. Her long streaming lines gave her a rather snaky appearance, strangely out of keeping with the pot-bellied looks of the average island trading-vessel. But then the *Flying Fish* had, in her youth, raced for silver cups at Cowes and off the Maine Coast, which somewhat explains matters.

If her yacht fame was past, she was famous now for other things. Her sailing records were the admiration and envy of every windjammer skipper in the Pacific, and not a few bark and full-rigged ships had to give way to her when she was running, beautifully light and easy, with a gale on her quarter.

She was famous for her brasswork that never had been removed since her yacht days, invariably kept highly polished and innocent of lacquer; for her beautifully carved and gilt Neptune figurehead; for her well-kept decks and exquisitely furnished cabins and saloons; and more so for her captain and owner, Wallace Hawke, who stood prominent among the big men of the islands, and who had grown with the Pacific trade since the days of "Bully" Hayes onward.

He was wealthy and he was no longer young, and there was no reason why he should sail his own ship. But like an old war-horse he was livest on the battlefield, and he stuck to the sea he loved for the sake of the game he had always played. Only the younger island generation wondered why he chose to poke and pry about in odd corners still, instead of retiring to Sydney or Suva and enjoying himself there; the older generation understood.



WITH a good cigar between his teeth, his bronzed, lean body stretched in a springy cane chair under the poop-awnings and a bottle of good whisky at his elbow, the captain was very much at his ease. The night was cool, rather a change for the latitude, and the glassy sea was a welter of gold where the

*Native hat made of bleached leaves.

porpoises leapt and gamboled. The stars were in their full glory, shooting beams of light across the low swells, the moon had not yet risen, and the combined noises of the tumbling wake, the musical ripple of the water along the hull, the occasional creak of the wheel, and the low throbbing boom of the wind in the arch of the canvas combined with a soothing effect. The wind itself was heavy with vagrant scents of flowers, coming as it did off the Islands of Samoa that lay somewhere away to port.

The second mate, whose watch it was, had gone forward into the starlight and shadow to see some trifling work on the jibboom, and except for the helmsman, who could not see forward because of the dim light of the binnacle in his eyes, the captain was alone.

He pitched his cigar overboard and yawned, coughed gruffly, and pulled at his mustache with fingers disfigured by years of reefing hard sails and splicing harder rope. He was in a thoughtful mood. The lack of any excitement on the voyage had warned him that either the islands were getting civilized, which they never will, or that he was growing too old to be thrilled. He had been born and bred with adventure, and he would have to die with it. It is like a drug, or liquor, or smoking, or like the sea itself—once taken it calls imperatively and insistently.

His thoughts reverted to the mate, Buck Standing, and he tugged his mustache fiercely as his anger stirred and ruffled within him.

It was not necessary to knock men about to get work done. The good officer was the man who could command without even raising his voice—The captain did not hear the shuffling footfall behind him, so intent was he on his thoughts—Well, the mate would have to get out in Apia, and then perhaps the second, young Hunter, should have his rise and his chance to make good—The belaying-pin caught him under the ear and he went limp with hardly a groan, though he retained his senses a little. Strong arms lifted him, carried him to taffrail and let go. He tried to struggle but could not move a limb. The sound of the water, the wind and the wheel grew together in a jumbled roar in his ears. He tried to call out but darkness clouded his eyes and seemed to clog his throat. He felt the wind ruffle his hair as he plunged downward.

The splash was drowned by the boom of the wind in the arched sail of the mainmast.

The mate chuckled softly as he saw the white-clothed figure melt into the swirl of the wake, and he thought with gratification of the rich cargo under his feet and the one hundred pounds of ambergris below in the safe, in the captain's cabin. It was worth trying for. There were dozens of places in little-known seas where a ship could be disposed of without too many questions being asked. The *Flying Fish* slid on her course, and the nodding helmsman saw nothing, heard nothing. Away on the beam a whale threshed madly in the throes of agony and in a phosphorescent foam, as a swordfish thrust into his throat. The noise drowned all sounds for a few moments.

The belaying-pin, striking partially against the back of the cane chair, had not completely stunned the captain. The shock of plunging under water and then slowly rising to the surface, roused him somewhat. He struggled feebly for breath and life, the instinct to live beating aside the numbness that was creeping over his faculties. Involuntarily he moaned. Then he choked as the sea gurgled into his lungs, coughed, and drew together his scattered wits.

In less than a minute he was swimming strongly, and keenly aware of a splitting headache, and of a lump that arose with alarming swiftness under his white hair. The initial shock over he was conscious that he was thrilled. The knowledge made him laugh. And he had thought the islands were getting tame and civilized!

"Now who the — could that have been?" he murmured, as he slid down a glassy sea slope and heard the suddenly shut off wind whispering over the ruffled crests above him. "Must have been Standing, and I picked him off the beach in Perth when he hadn't a penny to call his own. Some people have a sense of gratitude. I expect this is for the calling-down I gave him this afternoon. I was wishing for variety; Lord, I've got it."

He grinned whimsically, very much like a boy. Adventure belongs to youth, and its followers are always young.

Raising himself out of the water the captain could see, as he rose on the crest of a slithering swell, the white stern-light of the *Flying Fish* bobbing up and down and fast fading from view. He sighed

philosophically as he turned on his back and floated. He supposed it was the end. They would never hear him call aboard the brigantine. The sea was warm and he would not cramp, but the heat of the morrow's sun would finally drive him insane, even if a shark did not pick him up before then. One thing, the *Flying Fish* had been dead in the lane of the Apia-bound traders, and there was a chance, one in a thousand, that he would see a ship in the morning. A long chance, it was true, but still better than no chance at all.

He wriggled out of his white uniform suit. It made floating easier. He began to wonder what Standing would say, and grinned in the starlight. The beggar had nerve enough to sail into Apia and declare that the captain had been washed overboard in a sea. Perhaps he would even forge papers and declare that he had bought the ship. But of course, Hunter would stop that little game before—a splashing near by attracted his attention, and caused him to roll over with a cold hand clutching at his heart. A shark! He caught sight of a dark round object on the crest of a swell, and with a sudden determination to have it over with, he swam toward it. His nerves were not very steady, for he was not as young as he had been. He found time to remember that he had lived as clean as most men, and had always played the game. He swam on his face set. A white patch revealed itself in the center of the black, and then the captain shouted wonderingly, and with relief. He felt his released heart thump. In a few moments he was gaping at the man he had been last thinking of.

"Hunter! What the —— are you doing here?"

The second mate gasped. His mouth opened and shut as he strove to speak. His battered and bloody face worked with emotion and his eyes were wide with alarm. It was plain he was badly scared by his predicament.

"You! That you, c—cap'n?" he half sobbed. "My God, what shall we do? I thought you were dead—dead! It's murder! We're done for!"

He was well nigh hysterical for a few moments, wasting his strength on useless threshing about. He raised himself time and again out of the water and shouted after the vanishing ship, already long out

of earshot. The captain swam up to the frightened man and shook him roughly.

"Pull yourself together, Hunter. All this won't do any good. Tell me what happened. Come now!"

The young man coughed as a ripple lapped into his mouth. He shook his head, dashed the water from his eyes, and began to steady himself. The captain's calm voice acted like a tonic.

"R—right, sir," he gasped, catching his breath.

He swam slower and composed his shattered nerves. After a moment he sighed with relief, as it came to him he was in no immediate danger.

"I saw—saw the mate ditch you over-side, sir, as I came up the poop companion. I tried to stop him, but he was too quick. Then he swiped at me with a belaying-pin wrapped in burlap. He must have hit you with that. We fought for a bit, and then he caught me a smash side of the head and ditched me too. Dirty rotter! Do you think there's any chance——"

"There's all kinds of chances," soothed the captain, knowing in his heart that the one in a thousand was all that was to be expected. It was harder for the younger man to face the almost inevitable end. He had the cream of his glorious youth still to enjoy, while the captain was past such enjoyments. Because he could sympathize and understand the second mate's panic the captain did not think too harshly of him for his fears.

He wondered whether Standing had been planning to kill him all the time, or whether it was just a sudden impulse. Had he, too, planned to kill the second mate, or had the act been forced upon him by the young man's sudden appearance? He did not know, would perhaps never know. In any case it was no use speculating. The main thing was to keep alive till the dawn, and then look out for any ship.

No more was said. Both men were good swimmers, and had no trouble in keeping afloat. Now that the second mate had got hold of himself he gave no more trouble and said nothing more about their predicament. The captain estimated they were about thirty-five miles off the Samoan coasts, and though he doubted whether he or Hunter could make the distance, the sturdy spirit of the man forced him to try. Both fell into a steady breast-stroke, and

with the sea alive with curious fish about them, and the starlight shafts dancing in their eyes they headed for the distant land.

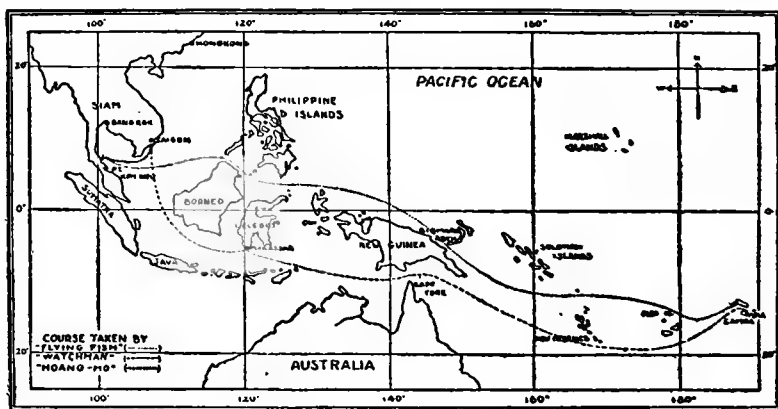
Time ceased to be. Each man was busy with his own thoughts. It was probable that each man was looking back over his life and wondering how it would affect the future, if there was any future. The night drew on and presently, like a silver simitar, the moon peered over the sea-rim. Seen from the level of the water, the light gave the swells a ghastly appearance.

A school of flying-fish, rising so near the swimming men as to fan their faces with beating wings, sped across the sea-valleys and disappeared, still flying, like silver and rainbow cigars. A heavy bulked, short, black-skinned killer-whale shouldered through the water and nuzzled the younger man. He gave a startled cry and pressed against the captain, who reassured him that the killer-whale, for all it has the most terrible jaws of any living thing, and that it is the lord of all things in its own element, never attacks man unless first attacked.

After nuzzling the nervous Hunter again, and giving the captain a share of attention, the killer-whale lived up to its reputation and slid away in the wake of a curious blue-pointed shark, also harmless to man. Bunches of weed drifted by occasionally, alive with tiny crustaceans and writhing squids; once a huge turtle cleaved a noiseless way in a westerly direction, bound apparently for some breeding-ground; three times dusky frigate-birds drifted out of the night and fluttered near to investigate the bobbing heads of the swimmers. In spite of the fact that from a ship's deck the sea looked desolate and bare, from the water it was seen as teeming with the living, the monstrous, and the terrible. The night wore on and a chill began to tinge the air, though the water remained warm enough.

A murmur of voices came down on the wind. Half-dreaming, the captain did not

heed at first. But the voices persisted. As a huge swell lifted him into the wind the captain stopped swimming and listened. A porpoise rose behind him, snorted, and boiled away, drowning all sound. The captain waited until the next swell came. Hunter was listening too, and both men distinctly heard disjointed words. It was uncanny. From the glimpses they caught of it the sea was innocent of living men. But the shadows were ideal concealment.



Each time the two swimmers rose on a crest they looked rapidly, their hearts beginning to beat high with hope. But it was some time before they saw and understood. Into the path of the moonlight drifted an outrigger canoe. Silhouetted against the silver sky the moving bodies of the paddlers were plainly visible. Both men shouted, but the wind laughingly carried the sound to leeward.

The captain dropped into a strong sidestroke, and set off across the dim valleys and shining crests, with Hunter close behind. Ten minutes later they stopped swimming and shouted again. This time the paddlers heard. They ceased their work and huddled together in superstitious awe. The whites of their eyes rolled in the gloom of their faces. It would upset the nerve of a level-headed white man to hear voices come out of the sea, especially in the deceptive light of the moon, and if he thought he were alone on that same stretch of water.

After a while one of the natives spied the two bobbing heads, and he shouted throatily with relief as a shaft of moonlight flickered on them for a moment and showed them for

the heads of living men. Hastily the natives thrust down with their paddles and in less than five minutes the swimmers were being hauled aboard and plied with questions by some forty Samoans.

The canoe had set out from Falealupo, in the Samoan group, to run to Apia some six days previously, but a healthy young gale had blown it to sea and it was now making back for its starting-place to take aboard fresh water and provisions. After that it would once more attempt the coast run to Apia. That suited the captain and seizing a paddle, after a brief rest to ease his stiffness he worked until he was in a glow. With the philosophy of youth, the naked Hunter, a little ashamed of the fears he had had in the water, broke into a quavering song, that grew stronger and stronger as he recovered his confidence and his body heat. The natives kept time with their long paddles and grinned at each other through the moonlight.



TWO weeks later the captain and Hunter drifted into Apia. They had come overland from Mulinu'u Point and were somewhat sparsely dressed. Stopping at a hut on the outskirts, resided in by one Dick Fisher, an old friend of the captain's, they had procured some clothes that fitted the older man somewhat loosely and the younger man somewhat tightly. And their grotesque appearance gave them no small embarrassment as they passed along the streets subjected to the curious stares of the natives and white men alike. First of all the captain led a straight way to his private residence, where he fitted himself and Hunter out with a bath and some reasonable clothes. Then he went down town to his trading-offices.

Mr. Hayward, the captain's general manager, was a smart young American, who, being straight from a Chicago business college, was a stranger in the islands, and had thus no prejudices, no likes or dislikes for any one in particular, and so was above being imposed upon by some of the acquaintances of the captain's younger days. He was an admirable young man for the position he held. A perfect wizard at business, clean shaven, neat, and with a rather cold smile. Withal he was rather a decent fellow. Without betraying too much surprize he arose from the swivel-chair at his desk, and greeted the captain

and Hunter with outstretched hand, looking cool and efficient in his immaculate ducks.

"This is a pleasure, sir. How are you? I was expecting you to dock last week."

The captain's brick-red face went redder yet as he shook hands. He puffed out his cheeks and half-whistled. Removing his sun-helmet he scratched his head, and ran his fingers through his white hair. He had been expecting the mate would bring the brig to Apia and report the captain and second mate as lost at sea. It was puzzling what else he could do with the ship and cargo. His papers gave him no authority to enter any other port than Apia or Suva.

"Then you haven't seen or heard anything of the *Flying Fish*?" he asked shortly.

The manager's face was a study. He stared curiously, as though unable to believe his ears. He must have thought his employer was insane.

"Why—why—I—you came in on her, didn't you?"

"I did not!"

"Then what—where—?"

"Never mind now. You haven't had word of her docking at Suva, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"—!" The captain turned to the worried Hunter. "What do you think of it?"

The young man shook his head and grunted. He had never had a similar experience and he didn't know what he thought.

"Are you going to inform the authorities?" he ventured at last.

The captain snorted and swore.

"And have myself laughed at from one end of the Pacific to the other? Think of it! Captain Hawke pitched off his own boat by a beachcomber he picked up and patted on the back! Look good in the papers, wouldn't it? No, sir. I'll settle this affair in my own way."

He turned and left the office with another snort, his ruffle of white mustache bristling aggressively. Behind him he left the mystified young American to gaze blankly at the Samoan girl stenographer in the outer office. The captain led the way down to the saloon and later to the water-front to hear the latest news.

He could not imagine what Standing had done to the ship. It seemed as if the sea had opened and swallowed the mate and the brig. They had had plenty of time to dock in either Apia or Suva. But they must have kept on heading south. The *Flying*

Fish represented a considerable fortune, what with the ambergris and the heavy cargo she carried. The captain could not afford to lose her, rich man though he was. Besides, there were sentimental reasons. He had sailed many seas and many years on the brig, and he loved her as only a sailorman can. He would not relinquish her without an effort.

And he wanted, as well, some satisfaction in getting even with the renegade mate. He knew that should he complain to the authorities they would make a perfunctory search, inform all the larger world ports, and then pigeonhole the complaint and forget the whole affair. Standing would not venture to any of the bigger ports if he intended keeping the brig, he had more sense than that. There were a thousand and one islands in the Pacific where he could hide the brig and transship her cargo piece by piece to another vessel. There were many ports, little unmarked places, where a man, who was known, could dispose of a ship without being asked too many questions.

The authorities would hardly trouble to make the careful search needed to find the missing ship. The trail would have to be taken up by the captain himself. And perhaps—but this he would not have admitted—the strong insistent call of adventure was urging him to go and seek and find, and to tread the dangerous pathways he had always loved.

Many men nodded to the captain, and some few drew him aside to discuss some business matter. All of them inquired after the *Flying Fish* and were surprised to learn that she had not docked. The captain casually told them, when asked, that she was still "outside," and no more would he say.

But, knowing him, many of the big traders and ship owners began to feel uneasy. He must have something up his sleeve. He was always, or nearly always, a jump ahead of any one else in any deal that was worth pulling off. And the captain's noncommunicative attitude added fresh fuel to rising suspicions. Several little secret conclaves took place in back offices and on board ships, but none could come to any conclusion as to what the captain was up to. Unwittingly he had the commercial part of Apia in a ferment.

While Hunter and the captain were stand-

ing on the jetty eying a heavily laden two-masted schooner that rode at anchor in the sun-lit harbor, a man touched the latter's arm.

"Say, Wally, I've been waiting here darn near five weeks to see you. Can I talk to you alone?"

With a smile the captain turned and shook hands with the newcomer. He was an enormously thin man, with a protruding Adam's apple, and a pair of large, melancholy blue eyes. He was unwashed and unshaven, and his tattered duck trousers; his dirty silk shirt and dirtier shoes gave evidence of having seen better days. A dilapidated sun-helmet, far too small for the bony head it covered, or partially covered, completed the strange one's outfit. He was a well-known figure in Apia, "Long" Charlie, the most notorious toper in the Islands.

A dozen fortunes he had made and drunk away; but as fast as he went broke and to the devil he rose again. Vagrant spasms of fierce energy, and a curious luck that seemed to dog his footsteps, kept him in a series of rises and falls. When he had any scheme in mind, and he always had when he was sober, he invariably came to the captain to stake him, for the two had sailed together when both were very young. Long Charlie was sober now.

"You can speak before Mr. Hunter. He's one of my officers," the captain observed, with a wave of his hand toward the bronzed young man with a bruised face, who stood by his side.

After a nod of recognition in the direction of the introduced, Long Charlie plunged into business.

"Say, Wally, I've got a brand-new guano island up north. It's a cinch and it's going dirt cheap because the bloke what owns it ain't the least idea——"

"Sorry Charlie, but I've got very important business on right now. If you're broke I'll see you through until I can look into your proposition. But say——" A thought struck the captain very forcibly. He raised a stiff forefinger. "I seem to have heard that you were acquainted with Standing?"

The thin one nodded mournfully, and his Adam's apple ran up and down his throat. Tears seemed to well into his big blue eyes.

"I suppose you're talking of Buck Standing. Eh, I knew him. The blighter

skinned me clean and cleared out one night in Cossack. We'd done a little pearling together, and was supposed to be partners. Huh! Know Standing! I'll say I——"

"Never mind that now, Charlie. You may be able to help me. What sort of a reputation's Standing got in Australia? Where would he be likely to head for if he got into trouble?"

Long Charlie scratched his head and stuck his thumbs into the rope yarn he wore in place of a belt. He slowly unlimbered his thinking apparatus and frowned heavily as he gazed at the white jetty stones.

"Reputation, reputation," he grunted slowly. "Can't say Standing ever had much reputation, leastways not of the white sort. He was wanted by the Japs for seal poaching and by the Russians ditto. Then there was some talk about him killing an old man in Cape Town. But I don't know 'bout that. I do know as he was supposed to be hand in glove with Sing Loo, you've heard of him?"

The captain shook his head and waited.

"Well, he's the skipper of a gang of wrecking junks in the China Seas, principally round the Gulf of Siam way. Leastways, this Sing Loo useter call himself a wrecker, from what I recollect, but you know most of the big junks and praus are pirate craft. Standing used to be on the regular runs between the islands and China, and used to run his packets up on some reef, during his watch, for his friends, that's Sing Loo and Co., to come and salvage.

"They got on to him in the end, the authorities at Singapore and elsewhere, and Standing had to skip in a hurry. Didn't call himself Standing in those days. Went by the name of Harris, Big Bill Harris. That's where he'd make for if he was pushed right now, to Sing Loo and his gang. But did I tell you how the blighter skinned me clean in Cossack when——"

"Yes, yes, you spoke of it once, Charlie. Listen to me."

The captain stopped the thin one's flow of speech with an uplifted hand, and then proceeded to tell him why he was so interested in Buck Standing. When he had finished Long Charlie whistled, a weird sound that closely resembled a horse's neigh. The interested Hunter chuckled involuntarily.

"That sounds like Standing, all right,"

the thin one observed. "He's the sort of a guy that would drop his skipper overboard. What do you aim to do?"

"Get my ship back first and then shoot Standing; I don't quite know."

Long Charlie licked his lips, and taking a pull at the rope yarn, that served in place of a belt, he hitched his disgraceful trousers a bit higher.

"Let's drink," he suggested.

The captain laughed as he led the way to the saloon, and beckoned to the colored waiter.

"Some of you can't think unless you're oiling the works."

"This is a very dry climate," responded the other mournfully. Over some bottled Bass, the affair of the disappearance of the *Flying Fish*, and the mutiny of her mate, was gone into somewhat deeply.

"I presume then it's safe to imagine that Standing is headed for the Gulf of Siam right now. Once there he could easily sell the brig's cargo, and the ambergris would be snapped up by any of the big Chinese perfumeries. The ship, I expect, he would either use to go in with the wreckers, or else sell it to them." The captain spoke thoughtfully, addressing Long Charlie.

"That's the dope," said the other cheerfully, refreshed by the beer. "It's a cinch he can't go anywhere else much, without any papers, and with such a well-known craft as the *Flying Fish*. If you'd only inform the authorities they would wireless the cruisers and Standing might get picked up before he even reached the China Seas."

The captain shook his head irritably.

"I've a hunch that I can see this thing through myself. If a cruiser goes chasing around my ship she's likely to shoot holes in her before Standing heaves to. No, leave the authorities out of the deal altogether."

"Well, as you please," Long Charlie shrugged. "Perhaps if you cared to ship me I could help you locate your man. Then we could go straight on to my island."

"Oh, confound your island! Tell you what, I'll sign you as second mate. Hunter here is going mate. But I haven't a —— ship of my own in port!"

Long Charlie thought for a moment, glanced gratefully at the waiter who had refilled his glass, and licked his lips with an overlong tongue.

"There's the *Watchman* in port. Why not charter her?"

"That little two-masted runt! Why she can't make more'n five knots in a full gale!"

"She's a good little craft just the same. She was the only packet to come through that typhoon in 1907 without being a total wreck. I don't know about her not making more'n five knots either. Course you can catch the Frisco mail-packet for Sydney and charter a fast schooner there."

The captain shook his head.

"I never sail on steamships, Charlie; you know that. I guess I'll take the *Watchman* and see how she goes. One thing, we can't get a ship in the Pacific that'll outsail the *Flying Fish*, so speed won't matter much. I'll go and see the *Watchman's* owners right——"

"——but she wouldn't answer. I asked her if she wanted to be reported at Apia. A fine craft too. Brigantine rigged and slim built. I'll wager she's a crack sailer in a good breeze."

The speaker, a young white-uniformed officer at a table a short distance from the one where the captain and his two companions sat, drained his glass and set it down slowly. He was a second officer of a steamship by the look of him, probably of the Australian liner that had docked only that morning. He was drinking and talking with the harbor-master, a short, red-necked man with a clipped white torpedo beard and a rather long, lean face. The captain rose from his chair, as he caught the young officer's words, and crossed to him.

"Pardon me, sir, I heard you speaking of a ship brigantine-rigged and slim built. Was her name the *Flying Fish* by any chance?"

The young officer looked up, surprized at the interruption, and then glanced across at the harbor-master who rose and laughed.

"This is Captain Wallace Hawke, Mr. Harvey. One of our big men hereabouts. Mr. Hawke, this is George Harvey, my nephew, second mate of the *Kaurie*——came in this morning from Sydney."

The harbor-master introduced the two men with a wave of his hand and then sat down. The captain sat also and leaned toward the officer of the *Kaurie*.

"I have a particular reason for getting information about such a ship as I heard you describe to Mr. Carson here. Would you mind repeating the incident you were talking of?"

The young man laughed and drummed on the marble-topped table with his fingertips.

"Sure, Mr. Hawke," he said. "There isn't much to tell. Three days ago, we had just left Suva, I was on watch, afternoon watch, you know, when we sighted a fine-looking brigantine heading southeast. Soon as she saw us she seemed to sheer off and take a new course. I flagged her and asked her name, and whether she wished to be reported in Apia. But she didn't answer. I thought it rather queer at the time, for there's not many skippers or officers either who'll refuse to answer a polite message. She kept on sheering off and in an hour was hull down. Couldn't see her name, so whether she was the *Flying Fish* or not I don't know. Perhaps, if you described her——"

The captain described his ship at length, and the officer nodded.

"That's her, sir," he stated conclusively. "She must have been the ship you want. She was heading southwest b' west, as near as I could figure, and crossed our bows about three miles away."

Thanking the man, the captain made his way back to his two companions, and told them what he had learned. Each man rapidly figured to himself keeping a chart of those seas in his mind's eye.

"Three days ago off Fiji," murmured Long Charlie. "She must have fallen into a calm or head wind after dropping you, Wally. And heading sou'west b' west. That'd fetch her——"

"Somewhere about the Hebrides," supplemented the captain. He grew thoughtful. "Sounds as if you were right, Charlie. He can either make Cape York, run the straits, and go along the trade-lanes past the Celebes, or else, and I expect that's what he'll do, he can change his course and run north of the Bismarcks and so keep out of the way of ships. You see he's probably figuring that after a week or so the *Flying Fish* will be listed as overdue, a few weeks more as missing, and finally as lost at sea. He'll see to it that the kanakas he's got aboard keep their mouths shut, and he believes Hunter and I are dead, so that there's none to expose him.

"The only chance against him is that some ship will report seeing him and make my agents suspicious. But then he can alter the brigantine's name, forge her new papers,

and if he keeps out of the regular lanes he's not likely to run across a cruiser or gunboat that will think it worth while boarding him just on suspicion. But for the fact of Hunter and I being fortunately saved, Standing's got a sure thing, so far as I can see."

Hunter nodded; Long Charlie nodded. The thing seemed logical enough. From Standing's point of view the whole thing was simple. His chances of getting caught, so long as he kept out of the big ports and of the shipping-lanes, were negligible. The captain rose energetically.

"I'll charter the *Watchman* if I can, and we'll get on the trail. Let's get out of here."

The three men rose and passed out into the street.



IN FOLLOWING up such a half-blind trail as the captain was, he was forced to leave a whole lot to chance. Even supposing Standing sailed for the Gulf of Siam and his wrecker friend, Sing Loo, the captain was just as far from getting back his ship as he was sitting in the saloon in Apia. True, if he once located the brigantine he could demand assistance from the Administration in getting her back. But, against the advice of Long Charlie and Hunter, he was determined to wash his own dirty linen and to keep the officials out of the affair altogether. One card he had up his sleeve, which, if it was not exactly a trump, was at least the next best thing to it. Like most widely traveled sailors he had friends in nearly every port of the world. And in Saigon he was acquainted with Hop Li, who was one of the leading merchants of the town, an owner of trading-junks and several thousand acres of rice and millet fields. As the first step in his search therefore, the captain sailed on the little *Watchman* for Saigon and the house of Hop Li.

Luck favored the *Watchman* and she traveled fast, stopping only at Maccassar for fresh water and a mess of vegetables for the sea-weary crew. The captain inquired at the port for the *Flying Fish*, but her very name was unknown in those waters, and none had seen a ship brigantine-rigged, with a carved Neptune figurehead. But the captain was not downcast. He counted on getting some information from Hop Li, who, in his capacity as a merchant, usually knew whatever ship was afloat within five hundred miles of his home city.

Barely two months after leaving Apia, the *Watchman* crept along the deep Saigon River, for the thirty odd miles that divided the city from the sea. The schooner, arriving at Saigon, tied up to one of the platform wharves, for the well-built jetties were not for such small sailing craft, being reserved for the steamers from all the world that plied back and forth.

The captain chose to go ashore alone and visit his Chinese friend, and he left Long Charlie to take Hunter, who had never been in the city before, around the streets and the modern shops, while he caught the tram and went out along the broad three-mile road to Cholon where Hop Li lived.

The Chinaman was nothing if not modern in every way; from the low stone building his extensive offices occupied, housing dozens of bustling stenographers and clerks, both of French and native birth, to the immaculate ducks he personally affected, and wore at all times when in Cholon, European fashion.

The captain walked into the cool offices and sent his name in to Hop Li, by a chubby-faced Chinese boy, and he was instantly ushered into a cool, secluded back room where the wealthy merchant conducted his purely private and personal affairs. The wide windows were shaded by green cane screens, electric fans hummed in every corner, and water percolated in soothing drops from the narrow spout of an ice-jar set on a low bamboo table. Desk and chairs and files, all were the latest models, and it was not until one looked carefully through the dim light at the huge, somewhat round-shouldered figure that rose to greet the captain, that one realized that he was indeed of Oriental birth. His large white teeth showed in a smile, creasing his faintly yellow face.

"It is two—no, four years since you came, is it not?" he asked pleasantly, shaking hands as he spoke. His English was very nearly perfect, as was his French and German, when he talked in those tongues. It was evident he was pleased to see the captain.

The captain smiled and nodded. He had once done Hop Li a very great favor indeed, and he knew that the Chinaman would do his best to pay the as yet unpaid debt. He plunged into business with an abruptness that was rude for the East, but Hop Li understood and only smiled.

"Do you know Sing Loo?"

The change that came over the giant merchant was remarkable. The smile vanished from his face, and his somewhat fleshy, ridged cheeks went flat and impassive. From the almond eyes a dull light flickered and then disappeared. Hop Li leaned forward in his swivel chair and gripped the curved arms with tense hands. The mask was upon him and his inner self was hidden.

"And why does my friend wish to know of Sing Loo?" he whispered somewhat hoarsely, his teeth showing slightly from between his thick lips.

The captain looked at him curiously and wondered what unknown wells he had stirred with his question. He spoke guardedly. One never knew with a Chinaman, even if one claimed him as a friend. Speaking crisply, somewhat curtly, the captain told the tale of the *Flying Fish* and of Standing the renegade mate, sometime known as Big Bill Harris, partner to Sing Loo, the wrecker of the China Seas. When he had done Hop Li, who had never moved all through the recital, sat back with a sigh, and hid his face in the shadow that one of the green screens cast almost imperceptibly across the room and the swivel chair. For a long time he was silent. Nor did he move until he spoke. He sighed again, with relief, as if some decision had been reached after a long struggle.

"My friend," he commenced abruptly, "for the sake of that which lies between us, I must aid you. Sing Loo is a strange man, I hardly know—myself—how strange. There is a price upon his head, and his haunts are secret. But enough. You tell me you lifted this man, Standing, from a penniless beachcomber in Australia—Perth you said, did you not?—to be mate of your ship. You tell me he returned the compliment by attempting to kill you and by stealing your ship. I happen to know that what you say is true—not that I should doubt you, anyway. Your eyes do not lie, and your mouth is firm, as that of a man—I have agents, you understand, who tell me little things the birds whisper to them. Big Bill Harris has returned to the seas of China again, and he has joined his comrade, Sing Loo. He returned two weeks ago."

For a while Hop Li was silent, until the captain began to fidget with his sun-helmet

on his knee, and wonder what was coming next. He felt that he was like a man who treads the edge of a vast abyss, seething with unseen monstrous things, the presence of which he was only half-aware of. He coughed slightly and waited.

"There is nothing less than ingratitude," resumed Hop Li, after a while. "To you I hold gratitude for the thing which occurred so long ago. This Standing, or Harris, has betrayed his. There is nothing less, nothing less."

Hop Li sighed as if he saw into the future and the past. His voice was timbreless, heavy with certitude.

"What is it is written on the back of the Golden Image in the Temple of Light? *'There is no man, however strong he may be, who will not find some one with greater strength to cast him to the ground.'* Although what I say, you will not understand for a while, I tell you, my friend, that this mate of yours has run into a circumstance that is at last too strong for him, as strange as it is rare. Rest content you shall have your ship and the man shall be handed over to you."

He looked around the cool office very slowly, as if seeking for eavesdroppers. He sighed again, like a man vastly relieved.

"All this shall be done for gratitude."

Hop Li breathed quickly, as if he had just passed under a cold shower of water. His eyes dropped to the white square of the blotter on the desk before him and he ran his tongue across his lips.

"If Sing Loo were here—were here," he whispered, "his life would not be worth an instant's purchase."

He recovered suddenly and sat up. He was the genial smiling merchant again.

"Never ask questions when Fate runs with you," he cautioned. "A wise man also keeps his lips closed over matters which he may guess but does not understand. By the wharves in Saigon, you will find the junk *Hoang-Ho*. Be on board at sundown, alone. I shall not see you again, for I go north tomorrow."

He rose and held out his hand, and before the bewildered captain could think of anything to say he found himself on the sidewalk waiting for the tram.

The mystery of the East struck the captain full force. He was aware that he had run against something greater than he had thought for in questioning about Sing Loo,

the wrecker, reputed pirate. Who was he? What was there about him, what connection had he with Hop Li, to make the merchant act so strangely? The captain had thought he had known the Chinaman, but he began to reconsider his knowledge. He gave up the problem after a while and sat back, to watch the shops and houses sliding past. The main thing was to trust in Hop Li and be aboard the junk at sundown. He would take his revolver though, and he would leave word with Long Charlie and Hunter where he was going. One never knew in China.



THE light-blue silk-clothed figure, on the junk's high poop beside the captain, raised a skinny arm and pointed ahead and away on the port bow.

"See? Singora light over there. Him fixed on Point Koh Ngu," he lisped softly.

The captain watched the light flicker and twinkle like a great star through the deepening dusk that crept over the Gulf of Siam.

Since the previous day the junk had been sailing lazily onward, assisted now and then by the coolies midships who handled the long, awkward sweeps from the fore-and-aft benches that ran along the side, just below the curved bulwarks. The captain had been surprized to find that Hop Li was not aboard the *Hoang Ho*; but the strange creature, little and wizened, in the blue silk costume, answering to the name of Sammy, had accosted him as he stepped aboard and taken him in charge, so to speak, evidently acting under instructions.

The captain had gone through the night and the day like a man in a dream, or like a spectator who looks on a scene from afar, conscious of being with it heart and soul, but not of it. The captain felt utterly alone with the Chinese crew around him and only his revolver between himself and death should they take it into their heads to disregard their master's instructions and rob him and leave him drowning in the warm sea.

Nothing occurred to make the captain apprehensive, however. Sammy was always at his beck and call, always within ear-shot, always ready to point out lights and landmarks. There was no fruit or delicacy the captain could mention, even in idle conversation, which the junk could not, at the command of Sammy, produce.

Every comfort was afforded the white man, and he sensed the hand of Hop Li in the many attentions he received that made for his ease.

"Yes, on Point Koh Gnu," lisped the Chinaman again. "We shall be there in one, maybe two hour, I t'ink."

"I know, but where? Where in the — are we going? This course leads to Bangkok. Two English steamers have passed us today, and one French ship, all heading the opposite way we are heading. They were carrying teak—could see the deck cargoes. They must have come from Bangkok. There's no other big steamer port hereabouts, is there? Are we bound for Bangkok?"

The captain was irritated. Perhaps the slight touch of malaria he was suffering from made him so. But Sammy only laughed and glanced sidewise at the white man.

"We not go Bangkok. You never mind where we go. Best you forget. Hop Li say he tell you not ask questions, also keep lips very much closed."

The captain checked the angry words that rose to his lips and sighed.

"By jove, that's right," he said moodily.

He did not speak again, but fixed his eyes on the light ahead. He noticed that when it had sunk from view astern the junk changed her course to port by at least twenty degrees. Then, after awhile, he saw through the darkness ahead, barely lighted by the starshine, the loom of a small island. But what interested him more than the presence of land were the ships riding at anchor off the island, on the side they were approaching, each carrying a riding-light on the mainmast. Crafts of all sorts were there, from the unwieldy two-masted junk to the slim Malay prau. And among the rest, above the rest, towered the graceful sides and the tapering masts of the fastest sailer in the south, the *Flying Fish*!

The captain walked, a trifle unsteadily perhaps, to the junk's side and gripped the carved rail of the poop. His ship! How much he had missed her he had not even guessed until he saw her in the gloom of night surrounded by the very scum of the Siamese Gulf, at the mercy of infidels who did not even know what a good ship was when they possessed it. He forgot Standing for a moment. It was good, so good to

see the brigantine after so many weary months. He would take good care that if ever she was taken from him again it would be by death or by the anger of the sea.

The *Hoang-Ho* dropped anchor and in a smart, modern-looking launch that was lowered from the side, Sammy took the captain aboard the *Flying Fish*.

The brigantine's forecastle ports were lighted up, as were the saloon ports beneath the poop-deck, showing that some one was aboard. The launch rasped alongside midships where a pilot ladder dangled, and Sammy and the captain clambered aboard. Several Chinamen, all of them naked to the waist, armed with various weapons, but most of them crises, rose from the main hatch where they had been lying talking together and came toward the two invaders with lowered heads and searching eyes. Sammy spoke a few words in a low tone and the advancing men instantly halted and their hands went to their brows in a curious sort of salute. A few more words and they fell in the wake of the newcomers as they made their way on to the poop and clattered down the saloon companion to the saloon below.



STANDING was entertaining royally. The table was thronged with bottles and glasses, the white cloth stained with spilt wine. There were fruits, meats and vegetables galore. There were also men, the majority of them the commanders of the surrounding junks and praus; and women, slant-eyed painted women. Nearly all were drunk, and the saloon was in an indescribable confusion. The whole was lighted by the soft light from the gimbal lamps screwed in the deck-head.

Standing, seated in the captain's chair at the after end of the table, was just raising his glass to his lips when his hand was arrested as by some invisible bar. The wine trickled unheeded on his shirt. His mouth gaped, and his heavy, blackly unshaven face was tense with astonishment. His eyes widened and the sheen of the drink in them faltered and died, leaving them frightened and sober looking. One does not murder a man off Samoa and expect to see him in the Gulf of Siam!

The captain pushed Sammy aside, stepped clear of the companion and took one stride toward the table. The assembled company turned their heads one by one,

aware that something was toward, and grew sober. The laughter and the jumble of the tongues died, the glasses ceased to tinkle. Across the length of the table Standing faced the captain. No one noticed Sammy for the time.

"You! You!" Standing licked his suddenly dry lips.

The woman who sat on his lap laughed sillily, and he brushed her away without looking at her. The glass he held crashed with a tinkle to the carpet of the deck. There was silence. No one breathed, but every one waited.

"Rather a surprise, Standing," observed the captain coldly. "I have come for the *Flying Fish* and for you. Anything to say?"

The other rose from his chair, disclosing his belt and holster strapped about him, and ran a shaking hand across his eyes. They bulged in their sockets.

"You!" he almost screamed. "You're dead! How did you get here?"

Sammy pushed his way politely forward. The instant he came into the full lamplight the assembled captains and the masters of praus rose to their feet and made the same curious salute the yellow men on deck had done. Sammy said something in his native tongue, a few short words, orders it seemed, and immediately the men stepped away from the table and, drunk or sober, made for the companion and the deck without a word, casting curious glances at the captain and the astonished Standing. The painted women crept after the men. Except for Sammy and the other two the saloon was empty.

"Speak, can't yer?" screamed the mate.

The captain walked the length of the table toward him, his eyes cold and hard and his lean body tensed with control. Standing edged clear of his chair and met him, one hand at his own working throat, the other out as if to fend off an apparition.

"I was not drowned that night off Samoa," said the captain brusksly. "Neither was Hunter. That's all. Now, I've come for my ship and you."

"Not drowned!"

There was relief, almost gladness in the mate's voice. He removed the hand from his throat slowly and dropped it on his revolver. Sammy edged along the table and watched.

The mate recovered his nerve with

astounding rapidity. He laughed, a little shakily, and spat at the captain's feet. "Well, what you going to do about it? I'm among friends here."

He looked around and realized suddenly that his friends had gone. He snarled.

"Huh! Bribe 'em, eh? By thunder, Hawke, you can't put anything over on me!"

He whipped out his revolver, and Sammy, reaching across the chair, smashed a full bottle of champagne across his wrist with a lisped—

"No shoot here, smash furniture."

The revolver thudded to the carpet and the captain kicked it contemptuously aside. Then his control snapped. He looked round on the saloon that had been the envy of the Pacific, on the ruined carpets and the scarred woodwork, on the choice wines opened to feed the scum of the gulf, and his fist went out as his head came back to face the mate. It knocked the heavier man back a trifle but did not land square enough on the jaw to quiet him. Sammy calmly picked up another full bottle of wine and smashed it over the snarling mate as he was preparing to rush. He dropped with a groan, and the Chinaman lowered him carefully into a chair.

"Hop Li says you not to be hurt. This man too big for you. You shoot him if you like."

The captain recovered his temper and shook his head.

"I'll tie him up and pitch him in one of the cabins, then we'll see about working the old *Flying Fish* down to Saigon. I've got some extra men on the *Watchman*; she's the ship I came west in. Can you get me a crew for a few days?"

Sammy nodded eloquently and made a motion toward the companion. The captain nodded and went up on deck, followed by the Chinaman. As he stepped clear of the hatchway and out on to the poop a thought seemed to strike him. He wondered why it had not done so before. Everything, every word Sammy had spoken since leaving Saigon, every word Hop Li had spoken, pointed to the one inevitable conclusion. The captain turned and faced the Chinaman.

"Hop Li is —?"

The Chinaman reached out a skinny hand and pressed the captain's arm, but he could not check the captain's words.

"—Sing Loo!"

"Hop Li says you keep lips very much closed and you not ask questions too much," the other lisped rapidly.

Then he brushed past the captain and walked to the forward taffrail from whence he called a man to come and bind up the mate in the saloon below. Then he lisped out orders concerning the anchor and the sails. Half a dozen praus surged alongside for lines to warp the brigantine clear of the surrounding ships.

The captain stood dazed with the shock of his own discovery. No wonder Hop Li had changed so abruptly at the mention of Sing Loo's name. He must have thought the captain knew! The struggle with him was, of course, whether he should betray his old partner, Standing, who would in that event betray him, unless he had him killed; whether he should repay his ancient debt to the captain by returning his ship, or whether he should aid Standing in getting away. No wonder that Hop Li had insisted that ingratitude was one of the lowest of things. Doubtless, the man, like all Chinamen, had his own peculiar code of honor.

The exact forces which must have swept him in the little office in Cholon would have to be guessed at. He was flying into retreat, going north, until he was assured he was safe. The captain nodded thoughtfully to himself as he watched the stumpy junk masts slipping by through the night, and felt the well-remembered deck quiver under his feet again. He felt a moment's regret for the Samoan crew. They had been abandoned by Standing in one of the Malay villages and had thrown in their lot with the coast fishermen, so Sammy had told when asked earlier in the day. Too bad, thought the captain.



NOT having any papers, and not wishing to go through a rigmarole of red-tape, for the French can be very officious at times, the captain did not run the *Flying Fish* into Saigon. He went up to the city in the *Hoang-Ho* and, boarding the *Watchman*, gave instant orders for sailing, which, however, he postponed for a while. He had Standing smuggled aboard under cover of dusk, and Sammy obligingly agreed to come with him and witness the fun.

The *Watchman's* decks were spacious

enough, and two or three hurricane lamps gave sufficient light. The bamboo wharves were deserted by dark. The somewhat puzzled Hunter and Long Charlie stood by while the captain cut Standing's bonds. The mate staggered to his feet and glared around on the four intent faces; that of Long Charlie, his old partner, sneering cynically with resurrected memories; that of Hunter, dark with suppressed passion and eagerness; that of the captain, stern and set, heavily frowning; and that of Sammy, impassive, yet mildly curious at what the queer white devils were going to do.

"Hunter," the captain rasped, "this man attempted to murder you, do you want to thrash him? I'd give the rest of my life to be able to, but he's too husky for me. I'm an old man, and you're young. If you don't lick him, you're fired!"

Long Charlie neighed like a horse, and flung off his battered sun-helmet. His Adam's apple ran up and down his throat as he took a pace forward and stretched a scrawny arm straight in front of him, toward Standing.

"I kinda think I'd like to lick him m'self," he said. "Seems I'm bothered about a little affair in Cossack, remember it Buck?"

"Go t'—," snarled the burly mate, his arms dangling with clenched fists like a gorilla's. He was hatless and dirty and he looked very formidable.

"What you aiming t' do, Hawke?" he demanded, turning on the captain. "What you aiming t' do?"

Hunter slipped off his coat quickly and pushed Long Charlie aside.

"This is my affair, Charlie," he muttered. "Put up your hands Standing! If I can't lick you I'm going to kill myself trying!"

The mate swung sullenly toward him and then looked back at the captain.

"And what's going to happen after I've licked this pup?"

The captain hesitated. It had been in his mind to hand the mate over to the authorities after all, but he felt somewhat softened now he had back the *Flying Fish*. Sammy leaned and whispered something in his ear and the captain slowly grinned. He nodded. Forces were working to keep Standing quiet.

"I'll let you go. I'll kick you off my ship, for I think you've had a lesson, or will have had by the time Hunter gets done."

The mate asked nothing more. The

pent-up rage at being checkmated that had been boiling within him burst to the surface. He flung himself on the waiting Hunter with a snarl and bored into the fight. It did not last long, perhaps ten minutes, and the captain said afterward that it was the fastest, bloodiest thing he had ever seen. Even the hardened Long Charlie, who had something of a reputation himself, admitted it was "some go." Standing was by far the stronger man, but Hunter was the younger and the cleaner lived. Also he was not very weak himself. And, more important than all, he was driven on by a rage that made him impervious to blows and exhaustion. He remembered the horrors of the sea after he had been battered by the belaying-pin wrapped in burlap, and flung overboard.

At the end of ten minutes Standing lay a crumpled heap in the scuppers, bruised, bloody, and sobbing to himself, while Hunter, in a not much better condition, was supported by Long Charlie's arm, but still capable of hitting another blow or two, which Standing certainly was not.

The captain was grinning, and his good humor, so long absent, had returned. Long Charlie was smiling sweetly as he gazed on the quivering heap that had been a vicious, strong man a few minutes before. He was thinking of Cossack. Even the Chinaman was smiling a little. Hunter was aware of a grim satisfaction as he struggled for his breath and sucked his split knuckles.

"Send two coolies aboard for him when you go ashore, Sammy," said the captain with a wink.

Sammy bobbed and nodded and with a muttered word of farewell was gone down the gang-plank. Ten minutes later two yellow-skinned, half-naked coolies came silently aboard, and lifting the still groaning mate, carried him ashore and into the darkness of the bamboo wharves. The captain chuckled as he turned and led the way to the poop.

"Where they taking 'im?" queried Long Charlie, sensing something in the wind, as he half-carried Hunter.

The captain chuckled again.

"Sammy—that's the chink—suggested that he knew a gentleman who wanted a strong coolie for a couple of months' work in the rice-fields of the interior. I made sure it was just for a couple of months. The work will do Standing good."

Long Charlie's neigh of laughter woke the echoes, and even the battered Hunter could not forbear to grin.

"We sail now," resumed the captain as he made to mount the low poop companion. "The *Flying Fish* is waiting outside. The junk I came in on is going with us and she'll bring back the crew the brigantine's got aboard now, as soon as we send our own on. You can take the *Watchman* back to Apia, Hunter. I'll work my own ship. Charlie, you'll come with me— Some day," went on the captain after a moment's pause, as he commenced walking aft, "I'll tell the pair of you of my adventures the past two days, all except one little incident. I've

learnt something too, Charlie. How's this? 'Never ask questions when Fate runs with you,' and, 'A wise man keeps his lips closed,' good, eh?"

"Not bad," grunted the thin one, staring away into the murk of the river, where a brilliantly lighted French liner was picking her way. "But what about my guano island?"

"Oh, confound your guano island," snapped the captain. Then he laughed.

"We'll look it over, old man, as soon as I can get the *Flying Fish* cleaned up and in shape again. Call the hands to stand by— Hunter, sit down on the skylight until you feel better. That was a whale of a licking you handed Standing!"



IN 1858 the Pony Express was superseded by the Overland Stage which carried mail between Sacramento, California, and St. Joe, Missouri. Much bullion from the rich diggings of California and Nevada was shipped East by stage, adding greatly to the dangers of the long journey. Armed escorts were of little use since Indians or bandits could easily outnumber whatever guard might be carried. Speed of travel, nerve of the stage-driver and the employment of special agents along the line to make it an unhealthy place for outlaws were the chief factors of safety relied on. Stations

for supplies and relays of horses were maintained every ten miles, where expert wranglers waited in readiness to replace quickly the reeking stage-horses with half-wild fresh ones when the galloping, swaying outfit pulled in. Such a station was kept by H. J. Faust down in the salt-grass bottoms of Rush Valley, some nine miles east of Point Lookout.

On the morning of July 10th, 1868, he climbed up on the horse-stable and earnestly scrutinized the road toward Lookout Pass.

"See anything now, Doc?" asked young George Boyd, who for an hour had been keeping six rearing, plunging broncos ready for the stage.

"Thribble H," copyright, 1922, by Glynn Bennion.

"Not a thing. She's sure late this time."

"Doc" Faust climbed back to the ground with a worried look on his face and fervently cursed the thunder-storm which had temporarily put the telegraph line out of commission.

"Say, George, I thought I saw Porter Rockwell's buckboard pass here just at dark last night going toward Vernon. Did you see who was in the outfit?"

"Yep. Him an' Bateman. I seen 'em pass when I was down watering the horses," returned the capable Boyd. "Guess they're going out to Port's Guv'ment Creek ranch."

The two men again vainly trained their shaded eyes on the long road, meandering like a white ribbon westward, and upward, across the shadscale slope to the pass in the limestone ridge. Then Doc Faust turned quickly toward his helper.

"I'm afraid something's wrong. Dave should have been here long ago with the mail.

"You take Sundown and hit for Vernon. Rockwell is likely at the store getting supplies this morning before starting for Government Creek. You'll have to ride to catch him. Watch the Lookout road and, if you don't see Dave's dust, tell Port to hurry out there. Tell him Tabby is camped at the Hill Spring. I'll keep these horses ready for another half-hour, and then, if nothing shows up, I'll ride to Lookout and meet you there."

Young Boyd dived into the stable, from whence for a moment there came the sound of clacking stirrups and the snap of latigo-straps as he quickly cinched a saddle on a tall blue-roan. In the next moment he was clattering out on to the road to Vernon.

Once in a while, as the blue-roan ate up the four miles to Vernon, Boyd turned his face toward the Overland road quivering in the July heat-haze.

"Not even a lizard on it," he mumbled between jolts, and his face now betrayed growing concern for his friend, Dave Thomas, who drove the stage between Simpson Springs and Camp Floyd.

Arriving at the tiny settlement of Vernon, the rider turned into Sharp's place just in time to see Sam Bateman hitching a team to a loaded buckboard.

"'Lo, George!" called big Sam. "What's your hurry? You've sure soaked up ol' Sundown something shameful."

Bateman wiped sweat from the trembling

roan's neck disapprovingly as he was reined in.

"Had to, Sam, or you and the Old Man would've got away," explained Boyd as he slipped off the horse. "Where's the boss? Taking a parting 'drappy' with the Scotchman, I'll bet a band of horses."

"Ain't you a smart li'l gambler!" grinned Sam. "Yep. They're in the store, whispering to each other by now, I guess. But I'm a saying it's risky to go in there an' arrest 'em for horse-stealin' when they're takin' something to keep their spirits up and their breakfast down," warned the genial fellow as Boyd started for the house.

But Boyd was already at the door of the north room of the Sharp residence, where Rockwell's old chum, Adam Sharp, kept a store of supplies, including "valley-tan" whisky of local distillation.

Orrin Porter Rockwell, employed jointly by the Wells-Fargo Company and the Territorial Government of Utah to protect the mail, was leaning forward in his chair, glass of liquor held precariously in hand, while he whispered hoarsely and excitedly in Adam Sharp's enthusiastic face. They certainly "lo'ed each ither as brithers" as they swapped confidences and yarns and nourished the glow "o' kin'ness" with the potent valley-tan.

Both were men of parts, drunk or sober. Rockwell had spent most of his life hunting down horse-thieves and the various other kinds of criminals infesting the West in the days when decent men struggled to erect orderly communities on the frontier. Deprived of opportunity for culture of the higher faculties by his years of primitive strife with the bad men and hostile elements of a desolate and avoided land, Rockwell had been compensated by nature with a sharpening of his senses and instincts until they were the equal of any Indian's.

He was of slight build and somewhat sallow complexion, yet his every gesture denoted tremendous wiry strength and endurance. His low forehead, shaggy eyebrows and none too handsome features gave his appearance a somewhat aboriginal aspect, but his good eyes and the firm corners of his mouth were marks of principle and character. His long, gray hair was worn tightly braided and pinned up in a compact plait at the back of his head, for he held tenaciously to the weird belief that if his hair were never cut he would never

die with his boots on. And he didn't. History relates how he died in bed from the effects of alcohol.

Among other eccentricities, he had a habit of whispering when talking with close friends. Except when in his cups with some crony like Sharp, he seldom spoke to any one, and then his voice was high-pitched, reaching a squeak in moments of intense excitement. The startling quality of his hoarse, shrill tones had the invariable effect of unnerving an opponent in a show-down. This quality, together with his incomparable ability to read tracks, his shrewd strategy, his faculty for noticing everything, his tireless persistence and the painstaking care with which he built up his infallible calculations and prepared against every possible contingency, made his success as a hunter of outlaws proverbial.

But the genial warmth which the cronies felt toward each other was turned to quick wrath as George Boyd entered the commissary without the formality of knocking. Both turned and glared at the intruder in silence. This kind of welcome somewhat disconcerted the young man, and for just a tragic fraction of a second his tongue refused to articulate. That stuttering pause was sufficient to detonate the quick-tempered Scot. Leaping to his feet, with arm and finger eloquently outstretched toward the door, he burst into red hot profanity.

"Oot wi' ye, ye bletherin' Geordie!" he added.

But before he could make further comment on Boyd and his ancestors, Rockwell had risen and placed a restraining hand on his friend's arm, and with a mighty effort to master the white liquor, he said in a husky voice:

"Hold on, Adam. That's Doc Faust's man, and he'll have news we must hear. Spit it out, young feller."

Boyd had instantly recovered his poise, and now delivered his message steadily.

"Stage ain't showed up this morning. Doc is afraid Tabby's Utes are making trouble in Lookout. The wires have been down since the storm, Saturday, so we can't git no word from Peg Leg's station."

Rockwell made his way unsteadily to his hat and then to the door and out. By the time he had reached the corrals he was sober. He was quickly followed by the Scotchman, who proffered the use of saddle horses and men. The old scout nodded acceptance.

"I want you and three of your best horses, Adam. I'll have to leave my outfit here."

Turning to Bateman, he gave a brief order, and then to Boyd—

"Guess you'll go with us?"

Without waiting for a reply, Rockwell wheeled and gave his attention to catching and saddling a horse. In ten minutes the four men were on the road leading to Lookout Pass.



AN HOUR'S fast ride in silence across the smooth, shad-scale flat brought them to the mouth of the cañon where Doc Faust, just arriving from his station, joined them. Rounding a turn in the winding gulch, they came suddenly upon the stage-coach overturned in the dry wash at the south side of the road. A horse with head turned under his shoulder lay partly beneath the vehicle. The other five stage-horses were nowhere in sight.

"Looks like Dave had an accident and went back to Peg Leg's for help," hopefully suggested young Boyd.

But this explanation failed to remove the look of concern on the older men's faces. They knew that it was only a mile over the pass to Peg Leg Davis' Lookout station, and had the stage-driver gone there for help he would have returned with it long ago. Closer approach revealed the mail pouches cut and piles of letters strewn around the wrecked stage.

Snarling an order for no one to go near the stage, Rockwell turned his attention to the erratic wheel tracks leading from the scene of the tip-over. Evidently the horses had been running without control before the fall into the wash.

Just then the good-humored chatter of a couple of magpies was heard in the sagebrush several hundred yards farther up the road. All hurried toward the sound, feeling now that their worst fears were confirmed. At their approach the two birds fluttered up out of the brush, loudly protesting the intrusion. There, prone on his face, lay the little Welsh stage-driver, swarms of flies buzzing horribly about a fearful hole in his back.

The men sat their horses in silence as they looked. They lived in a day when men's nerves learned quiet control in the presence of violent death. For just an instant, however, the white, tight-lipped face of George Boyd distorted itself into a sob

and the knotted neck-cords and clenched jaws betrayed the struggle to choke it back.

Then Rockwell dismounted and made a hasty but reverent examination of the body and noted that there were no tracks near it. With his eyes still reading the ground, he said,

"Doc, I know you need to get back to your station. Can you take care of this body and the mail? Better send Boyd for the nearest outfit, and then let me have him if you can spare him."

"I'll do the best I can, Port," said Faust quietly, and turned to repeat the order to his man.

But Boyd was already galloping toward the Lookout Station. For a moment grief for his friend was dominated by a wild surge of joy at the prospect of a man-hunt with "Old Port" and the chance to be in on ultimate vengeance.

Ordering his men to stay in one place, Rockwell returned to the stage. No tracks showed anywhere near it except the marks of the falling carriage, and the scrambling of frantic horses on the hard gravel floor of the wash and its steep, clay banks.

Believing that the horses would have stayed with the road if something north of it had not scared the lead team into the wash, Old Porter climbed out of the gully and proceeded to study the stony ground on the opposite side of the road. He soon found the tracks of a small, unshod horse in rapid motion paralleling the road. At the point where the stage tipped over into the wash, the pony had been violently checked, and then had crossed the wash by the stage.

A few paces north and a little east of the point where the body had been found, the dark green of several desert cedars broke the gray monotony of the barren hillside. The pony tracks came from this place, and there, hidden by the low, scraggy trees, Rockwell figured a horseman had prepared his ambush and waited for the stage. Beside the spot where the horse had stood was a large, flat boulder, on which lay several tiny shreds of burlap. After carefully studying the surroundings, the old frontiersman concluded that from this rock the outlaw had shot Thomas off his seat and then ridden swiftly after the driverless stage—perhaps slashing at the leaders heads with something until they plunged into the wash.

Going back to the stage Rockwell again

painfully examined the ground on hands and knees, but the clean gravel already disturbed by the horses gave no sign of human foot-print. Except for the rifled mail-bags, there was nothing to indicate that any one had been there other than himself.

Sight of the plundered mail suddenly roused him to the realization that the robber was getting away, and Rockwell decided to follow the bare-foot horse's tracks as fast as possible. Calling to Bateman and Sharp to bring his horse, he picked up the pony's trail where it crossed the wash and commenced running along its course.

The ground, still soft from the recent cloudburst, showed plainly what had happened. After the crash into the wash, which had killed one horse and liberated the rest, the fright-crazed animals had gained the opposite bank of the gully and then raced madly southward up the hillside, occasionally leaving behind them bits of harness and the splintered halves of double and single trees. The little bare-footed horse had followed them at an equal rate of speed.

His men having now overtaken him, Rockwell mounted and followed the tracks at a run, the trail leading them in a southerly direction, over a seemingly endless succession of rocky ridges and deep gulches. The nature of the ground and the swiftness of the ride made speech difficult, but at length Bateman seized a chance opportunity to remark:

"This trail's leadin' us to Tabby's camp, all right. Boyd said he was at the Hill Spring. Bet yuh this is Injun work."

"Don't think so," whined Rockwell's high voice. "This is a lone-hand play."

But Bateman wasn't convinced that it followed, therefore, that Tabby had had nothing to do with the affair. Topping a long, smooth ridge which overlooked a small valley, they stopped a moment to reconnoiter and breathe their tired horses.

"What the ——'s that a-coming?" questioned Bateman suddenly, as his keen eye caught sight of a dust on the far rim of the valley.

Then, as several tiny brown dots, five in lead and one following, dropped with astonishing speed down the hillside into the little plain below, each man instinctively began to pull rifle from scabbard. Later it was pushed back, as the approaching objects appeared to be riderless horses.

When they began the gradual ascent toward the ridge on which the men were watching, they slowed down to a trot and occasionally a walk, evincing the exhaustion of horses that have been running for hours. But whenever the rear horses apparently endeavored to draw nearer to the five ahead, they would crazily lunge forward in a heart-breaking gallop again to maintain their lead.

"Harness on 'em!" yelled Sam. "I wonder if——"

But every one now perceived that it was the five stage-horses returning, followed by a strangely-acting pinto Indian pony.

Then two of the men broke into brief laughter as the little pony made another pitiful attempt to catch up with the fleeing horses. The pinto had a gunny-sack pulled over his head!

"Told yuh it was Injun's work," said Bateman, a note of vindication in his voice.

Rockwell offered no rebuttal. Neither the violent revulsion of feeling caused by the quick transition from expected attack to its ludicrous dénouement, nor irritation that some one should press a theory opposed to his own could cause him to laugh, or for one moment relax from his unyielding determination to read the meaning of every circumstance. He, too, knew that it was an old Indian trick to stampede horses by sending another after them with a sack over his head. A horse thus dressed can dimly see through the coarse mesh of the burlap, and, made frantic by the awful confinement of eyes, nose and ears, believes he will be freed from torment if only he can join the horses ahead of him. These, snorting with superstitious fear at the unearthly object, dash wildly away to escape the pursuing fantom.

But the old scout considered that white men can learn tricks from Indians. Some aspects of the situation obviously pointed to Indian culpability; still, the cunning with which the holdup had been planned and executed failed to gibe with the purposeless outcome, if Indians were the perpetrators. Why hadn't they already taken the horses? The idea persisted that somewhere on the trail he had followed, a white man had left the pinto's back and made his escape afoot.

While it was not possible, on account of the freshly disturbed gravel about the stage, to determine conclusively whether or not a restive horse had been held for a few moments while his rider looted the mail, Rock-

well felt reasonably certain that no such stop had been made, and therefore the robber must have abandoned the pony, head already sacked, when they passed the wrecked stage. But if this were the case, how had the man covered his trail in leaving?

In the mean time Bateman and Sharp caught the horses and removed the cause of the stampede from the panting little pinto, who shook his mane and blew his nose in grateful relief. Deciding to ignore any opinion to the contrary, Rockwell determined to exploit his own theory of the episode, and therefore would not need so many men.

"Looks like our man had beaten us to-day," said he squinting at the afternoon sun. "Better take those horses down to Peg Leg's station and then go back to Vernon. I want to go over this trail again, and then I'll follow you. Keep your eyes peeled for strangers."

With this parting adjuration, Rockwell dismounted, and leading his horse, started slowly back along the way they had come, keeping a sharp lookout for any sign of footprints leaving the trail.



NOT many minutes after his companions had left him alone, he heard the sudden clash and rattle of horses' feet crossing a narrow strip of loose shale behind him, and whirled around to see three Indians on horseback riding toward him. It required his lightning wit to check the movement to grab rifle and jump for cover, for he instantly realized that only peaceable Indians would approach in the open. Then he recognized one of the bucks as Tabby Weepup, chief of a small band of Goshutes he had heard were camped temporarily at the Hill Spring, scarcely half a mile away. He had met and conversed with Tabby at Vernon several times, and considered him lacking in warlike attributes, although certainly capable of horse-stealing and other petty deviltry when the opportunity was good. Tabby, short, squat and ugly, was riding a first-rate saddle, whose well-kept appearance denoted recent acquisition. Rockwell was interested.

"Howdy," saluted he, as the somewhat glum-looking trio came up.

"How," returned Tabby.

Rockwell completed the customary greeting with—

"Where's your wickiup?"

"Mmh," grunted the Indian, turning his head, with pursed lips protruding, toward the Hill Spring.

By way of invitation, Rockwell dropped bridle reins to let his horse crop the scattering bunch-grass and seated himself on a shelving ledge near by. To indicate that he had nothing better to do for the moment than talk, Tabby Weepup dismounted and seated himself on the rock. The other two red men sat their sway-backed ponies in stolid silence.

"How many sleeps you se' down by Hill Spring?" asked the white man.

For answer Tabby held up both hands with all fingers outstretched.

"So many sneep,"* was his guttural reply.

Further questions elicited the news, mostly conveyed by wonderfully expressive facial gestures, that Tabby's people were busy gathering the big black crickets abounding in that region, which they were drying and grinding into meal for Winter use, and that in one more "sneep" they would start back to their home in Skull Valley.

"Where'd you get that saddle?" was the next question.

Instantly the Indian's face clouded, and he answered sullenly—

"Mebbe so me pine† 'um."

Rockwell mentally kicked himself for not realizing sooner that such a question would be considered as touching that red man's honor, and that he must proceed with more patience and tact to get the desired information. To mend matters he pulled a plug of tobacco from his pocket and offered it respectfully. The Indian took the gift in dignified silence and thrust it into his shirt. As he did so, Rockwell caught a glimpse of a nearly empty bottle of "H H H" liniment inside that unwashed garment. His curiosity still further intrigued, Rockwell queried next—

"You seen um white man?"

"Yas, me no see um," answered Tabby, this time in somewhat better humor, but Rockwell thought he noted evasion in the tone. Evidently the shrewd old Indian didn't want to be questioned about any matter he suspected might be used to separate him from the saddle.

So Rockwell tried another tack. He had already noted a doleful undercurrent in the manner of all three Indians.

*Sleep. †Find.

"What you feel bad for?"

This time Tabby's reply was straight to the point. He told how two days previously his brother had become ill from eating too many crickets.

"Medicine man say, 'Gi'm half tea'pful Thribble H,'" said Tabby gravely. "So I gi'm half tea'pful Thribble H. Pooty soon he aint git no better. Medicine man say, 'Gi'm 'nother half tea'pful Thribble H.' So I gi'm 'nother half tea'pful Thribble H. That time he died all right."

Then Tabby mournfully related how they wrapped the dead man up to carry him back to the tribal burying grounds in Skull Valley. But the Indians wanted to finish gathering the supply of crickets, so they carried the body up on to the bald limestone knob which lay between the four men and the Indian encampment. They left it there until they were ready to go back to "Skudda Warry."

"Injun pooty soon go," Tabby continued. "We come up git it." Then with a look indicating something gruesome: "Can't take it a brother. It's a no good. It's all spoiled."

Involuntarily amused by the tragic humor of the Indian's solemn recital, Rockwell gave no outward sign of anything but sorrowful attention. While the story was being told his astonished imagination was busy with the effect of internal application of the fiery Triple H, a liniment so strong that a drop on the back of the hand will raise a blister, and the mischief played by two hot July days.

"Who gave you Thribble H?" asked Rockwell, praying for luck.

The Indian was evidently now satisfied that his listener had no further designs on the saddle, for he told how a big white man, riding northward by way of the Hill Spring three days before, had ledged his fine horse in the rocks, bruising the animal's knees so badly that he was no longer fit to ride. He had then brought the horse into Tabby's camp, and taking a bottle of Triple H liniment from his saddle-bag had showed Tabby how to apply it to the swelled and stiffening knees.

Rockwell began to see light.

"Where is heap big white man?"

"Me I dunno. Me swap Injun horse; ketchum white man's horse and saddle."

Tabby protruded his lips northward in the direction the man took in leaving.

At this juncture a man was seen galloping

toward them along the tracks of the runaway stage horses. It was George Boyd, released by Doc Faust to assist Rockwell. The young man hadn't met Bateman and Sharp on the way, they having taken a smoother trail to Peg Leg's station, so he was tracking the party, determined to overtake them somewhere.

Not wishing to fraternize with the newcomer, Tabby mounted his scraggy little pony, and the three Indians rode lugubriously away.

Boyd reported that Peg Leg Davis had succeeded in repairing the wires enough to communicate with Sacramento, and in sending news of the holdup, had learned that the mail on the wrecked stage carried twenty-five thousand dollars in gold. None of this was found when the mail was gathered into the buckboard procured from Peg Leg.

Boyd handed Rockwell two bits of burlap which he had picked up from under a pile of letters. Rockwell examined them and glanced approvingly at the young man, but said nothing.

Pointed shadows were beginning to creep out on to the valley from the higher peaks, indicating the swift approach of sundown when further tracking would be uncertain. So the two men turned eastward toward Vernon, Rockwell's thirsty mount pointing his ears eagerly in the direction of water.

Gloom settled in the valley, while sky and peak were glorified by the pastel colors of a desert sunset. Night hawks, appearing from nowhere, fluttered and zoomed in the twilight, breaking the lonely stillness with shrill squawks and loud booms as they stunted in mid-air. Two deceitful coyotes practised coloratura behind a scrub cedar, jumping around the tree to make their yaps and trills appear to issue from forty throats.

But Rockwell's mind was too preoccupied with his problem to notice this evening performance, and as the monotonous jog, jog of his horse's slow trot steadily drew toward the settlement, he carefully worked over the puzzling experiences of the day.

Twenty-five thousand in gold! Quite a load for even a strong man to carry on his back across the desert country. But Rockwell was now convinced that the white man who traded saddle and crippled horse for Tabby's pinto had done that very thing. No Indian pony could carry a large man and seventy-odd pounds of gold as fast as

the tracks showed the little barefooted horse had followed the frightened stage horses up the steep hillside above the smashed stage.

It appeared certain now that the bandit had leaped from his pony to the fallen carriage in passing it, and while the pinto tried frantically to join the horses ahead, had carefully robbed the mail. How he had then walked away, carrying a heavy load of gold, without leaving a trace was the most perplexing circumstance the old scout had met with in his tracking experience.

During the ride toward the little pioneer village, first down a rocky gulch to the floor of Rush Valley and then out in the dusk across the smooth plain, Rockwell led the way Indian-fashion. Once he reined in his horse to permit his younger companion, who rode deferentially behind, to come abreast of him.

"How are you fixed for help at Faust station?" asked Rockwell in the usual high key.

"Doc said he could get George Wright to take my place until I come back," answered Boyd, humbly but hopefully.

Rockwell made no comment but spurred his horse to resume the place in lead, riding forward into the darkness erect and alert as an Indian. Wright, he reflected, was Faust's neighbor ranchman and a former pony-rider, therefore a first class horseman. Boyd's absence from the station would not be felt for a while.

Presently the clustered buildings of Vernon began to take form in the darkness, and the horses, breaking into a gallop in their eagerness to reach water and feed, quickly brought their riders to Sharp's place, where men and horses were soon fed and bedded down for the night. Rockwell slept in the house, while Boyd and Bateman, who had arrived with Mr. Sharp sometime earlier in the evening, were given some quilts and shown a pile of sacks in the granary, where they made their bed in defiance of the mice which had preempted the place.



NEXT morning the two young men were awakened before daylight by the figure of Rockwell, already dressed and armed, appearing with a lantern in the entrance of the granary. In the dim light his eyes blazed with the eagerness of a hunting animal about to take up the chase.

"Let's get at it, boys," he said, as the two men rose on elbows and sought to rub sleep from their eyes with their knuckles.

"You'd better get on out to Guv'ment Creek with that load of grub, Sam, an' tell the boys why we didn't get there with it yesterday. Tell 'em to gather out the beeves for a drive to Salt Lake. I've already sold 'em to Butcher White, so if I don't show up before the fifteenth, you'd better start in with 'em. I'll leave you in charge of the business until I get back."

Then as the men quickly pulled on their trousers and boots and ran their fingers through tousled hair to straighten it before appearing at the house for breakfast, Rockwell continued:

"Boyd, guess you'd better ride with me for a while. May need a little help occasionally. Git a bit to eat while I saddle the horses. We'll ride out to Lookout and take another look for tracks down that gravel wash below the stage."

The first graying light of dawn was just beginning to reveal objects hitherto indistinguishable, and on the low bluff overlooking the stream which watered the settlement, Rockwell could now make out a covered wagon with a few cows and horses tethered about it. Concluding that some belated traveler had arrived there and camped after he himself had gone to sleep that night, Rockwell struck out to see who the camper was, instead of going into the stable to saddle up.

As he approached the wagon it began to creak and tremble, indicating that the occupants within its canvas covering were already astir. A barefoot boy of ten or twelve years clambered out the front opening on to the double-trees and stepped to the ground. He eyed the approaching stranger quizzically for a moment, and then, as the horses nickered softly for their feed, he went quickly around the wagon and threw down the remainder of the scanty store of hay tied on a small platform projecting from the rear of the outfit. He hurried at his task of feeding the animals as only a small boy can hurry who feels he is the responsible head of a household.

Rockwell watched the lad a moment and then addressed a question to him.

"What's your name, sonny?"

To the boy such a question and appellative was wormwood, since it reduced him from the rank which he felt merit and cir-

cumstance had conferred upon him to the insignificance of nonage.

"Ain't got no name," he instantly retorted without once diverting his attention from the important business of getting the stock ready for the day's travel. He untied the two old milk cows from the rear wheel, and, spanking them sharply on the rump with the flat of his hand, urged those tenderfooted beasts down the rocky trail to the water.

The lad's mother, a young woman of perhaps thirty, having heard a strange voice without, raised the canvas flap at the front of the cover and peered out questioningly. She brushed back several wisps of black hair with her hand, the gesture a silent apology for appearing before making herself presentable with wash-bowl and comb.

"Which way did you come in?" Rockwell queried.

"We came from Camp Floyd yesterday," she answered. "My children and I are on our way from Salt Lake to join my husband at Dutch Creek. He has a ranch up there."

She pointed southward toward the mouth of a cañon in the beautiful blue Tintic mountains, ten miles away.

Rockwell knew the man who had recently settled on Dutch Creek. He was all right.

"Meet anybody on the road yesterday?"

"Yes," she returned. "We met a stranger in East Valley yesterday afternoon."

"How was he traveling?"

"Afoot."

"Say anything?"

"He seemed nearly choked, and asked for water. I had little to spare, but gave him a drink. He said he was a prospector taking some samples of ore in to Salt Lake City."

"He was wearin' his feet wrapped up in gunny-sacks," chipped in the small boy, forgetting alike his work and his former dislike of the grizzled old scout in his eagerness to tell the story. "He said his shoes wore out walkin' so far, so he had to tie sacks on in place of 'em," he continued.

At that juncture a baby began to cry lustily, and sundry noises betokened that other youngsters had awakened and were tumbling about, so the mother was obliged to retire within the wagon cover.

Rockwell was excited. "Where did you meet this man?" he fairly screeched at the boy.

Vastly flattered by the earnestness of his questioner's attitude, the lad endured the intense look from under Rockwell's beetling eyebrows unflinchingly while he answered with an exaggeration of manly bearing:

"'Bout five mile the other side of the Barron Pass, I should judge. Right where the road passes the White Knoll."

"What did he look like?"

"Big feller, with lots of whiskers."

Before the boy had finished his answer, Rockwell was loping down the hill toward Sharp's corrals, his arms outstretched to balance himself, and his big holstered pistol pounding his hip at every jump.

Bateman and Boyd having finished a hurried breakfast, were out in the stable preparing the horses for the day's work. Boyd was stuffing some small packages of bacon and flour, already mixed with yeast powder, into his saddle-bags against a possible time of hunger on the trail. Neither man had much to say. Bateman, keenly disappointed that he was to miss the man-hunt, was inwardly execrating the luck which made him the logical man to handle Rockwell's private affairs at Government Creek. Boyd was still too strongly affected by the tragedy of the day before to want to talk. Whatever possible exultation he may have felt at being selected to accompany Rockwell was entirely overshadowed by a blazing desire for vengeance on the slayer of Dave Thomas.

"Bring out the horses!" yelled Rockwell, as he came running toward the stable door. "We've got to ride like the wind to ketch that skunk 'fore he gits to Salt Lake!"

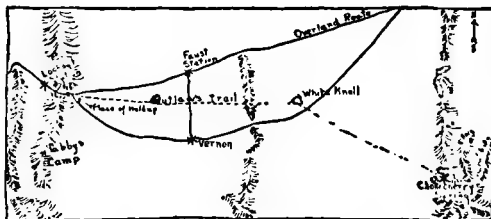
The idea that the other men could not possibly know anything of the conclusions his mind had leaped to, and his words were therefore meaningless to them, never entered his head. The all-important thing was to get to the White Knoll as fast as horses' legs and hearts could take them. Almost before his horse, scared by the signs of haste and excitement, could be dragged out of the stable, Rockwell had swung into the saddle and was spurring the nervous beast into a gallop. In another moment the two riders were lost in a swirl of alkali dust as they raced northeastward toward the red flare in the sky, where the light of approaching sunrise was vividly outlining in cold, blue grandeur the majestic peaks of the distant Wasatch.

Forty minutes of fast and uneventful

riding over a hard, sun-baked plain, punctured at intervals with treacherous badger holes and ground squirrel villages, and then onward through the low, narrow line of desolate limestone ridges and buttes which divide Rush Valley in the center, brought the two men to the place where the road passed nearest the White Knoll, a peculiar mound of soft, chalk-like substance, whose summit was perpetually blowing away in the wind. Rockwell slowed up his horse and began peering intently at the road as they moved slowly forward in the glare of the now risen sun.

Presently he saw what he expected to find and stopped his horse. Dismounting and handing his bridle reins to Boyd, Rockwell cautioned the young man to hold the horses in one place to avoid musing up the tracks. Then he stepped forward to make careful scrutiny of the place where the tracks plainly showed the covered outfit had been stopped for some time the day before. On one side of the road, caught on a shadscale spine, was a tiny shred of burlap. With a smile of triumph, Rockwell held it up for Boyd to see.

That young man instantly remembered where he had picked up a similar bit of the coarse stuff, and perceived at once the connection between the two. Knowing nothing of the circumstances which had finally led them to the White Knoll to search for the



robber's trail, Rockwell's achievement seemed little short of uncanny to Boyd. But he refrained from asking questions, considering that what Rockwell didn't choose to tell him, he would find out for himself somehow.

But again the old scout was sorely puzzled. He had expected to find a plain trail in the deep dust of the desert road leading directly toward Salt Lake City. On the contrary, it was clear that their man had not followed the road. So Rockwell began to move slowly in ever-widening circles about the spot where the man with feet

wrapped in burlap had received a drink of water from the outfit going to Dutch Creek.

After a time which seemed an eon to Boyd, Rockwell finally dropped on hands and knees to examine intently a spot where a faint bloom of dust showed on the hardpan surface of the desert floor. A few yards farther on he found a similar spot, barely perceptible even to his practised eyes. Concluding that at last he had found the track left by the wrapped feet, he thanked his lucky stars that no breeze had yet developed since the previous afternoon. And driven by the fear that at any moment such a wind might start which would destroy the last hope of following his quarry's trail, he forced his old eyes to follow without hesitation that feeble trace which showed only at intervals, often of rods, as a faint dusty blur on the ground.

Finding that the tracks followed a definite course at a tangent from the road, Rockwell called to Boyd to follow, but to keep off the trail.

Then, as they moved slowly forward hour after hour of the long, hot forenoon, and drew gradually nearer the high mountains forming the southeastern rim of Rush Valley, Rockwell found space in the back of his brain, while his senses strained fearfully at the task of following the dim trace, to estimate the cunning of the man he believed he was trailing. This man who had been forced to trade his fine horse to old Tabby Weepup was shrewd enough to realize that to ride away from the wrecked stage carrying a load of gold on a barefooted Indian pony would only invite swift capture by a skillful tracker on a good horse. To offset this advantage in horseflesh possessed by his enemies, the outlaw must have figured that to so wrap his feet in burlap as to leave scarcely one perceptible mark in ten yards would enable him to walk rapidly out of the country, while his pursuer, on hands and knees, if he ever picked up the trail at all, would be unable to use his horse.

By noon the two men had crept along the trail until they were within five miles of the mountains. Rockwell sat down on a pipsis-siwa bush to rest a moment and think. His eyes ached furiously. The burning glare of the July sun, reflected up from the smooth light-colored ground had almost blinded them.

The trail was leading in the direction of

the place known as Chokecherry Springs, where an abandoned prospector's cabin stood beside a coyote spring part way up a deep ravine. It now occurred to Rockwell as being too much of a coincidence that any one, choosing his course at random, should travel consistently toward the only water in the Boulder mountains. More likely the man was acquainted in the district and chose his direction advisedly.

It seemed a slim chance that the man they sought was now at Chokecherry, but if he were, Rockwell considered, he would be warned of their approach if they followed the tracks much farther, since they would shortly be in sight from the cabin. So Rockwell began casting about for an approach to the Springs which would be hidden from any one who might be located there.

Having perfected his strategy, the only information he imparted to Boyd was in the form of an order.

"We'll ride up this wash," he said, indicating a deep, dry flood-water course leading up to the mouth of the gulch just south of the one containing the water and cabin.

Riding swiftly along the smooth floor of the big wash, the men soon arrived at the place where it issued from the mountains. In a few moments more they were surrounded by great brown hillsides.

Halting long enough to pick out a spot on the northern skyline which he judged to be directly above Chokecherry Springs and its cabin, Rockwell led the ascent up the steep hillside toward that place. Tying their horses to a serviceberry bush a few rods below the top of the ridge, the two men crept cautiously to the shelter of a wind-tortured crag on the summit, being careful not to make any noise in the loose rocks about it. Then, removing their hats, they peered over its jagged edges and looked down into the cañon. There was the cabin, sure enough, two hundred yards below them, and near by a tiny green spot. A ribbon of wood smoke issuing toward them from the chimney and weaving lazily to and fro in the still air, gave each man a thrill.

And then the door opened and a tall, bare-headed man walked out.

He proceeded directly to the spring, coming back presently with a bucket of water. The sticky tongues and parched throats of

the watchers cried in anguish for it. A moment later the faint fragrance of frying bacon assailed their nostrils.

Rockwell remembered what the small boy had said about the man with burlap on his feet being bearded. At that distance the man below them appeared to be smooth shaven. But Rockwell reflected that a razor is easily carried, so he whispered,

"I believe that's our man!"

Boyd's teeth clicked, and he whispered in return—

"Shall I get the rifles?"

But Rockwell was too busy thinking to answer just then. For a long time he lay peering over the edge of the rock. When he finally turned back toward the younger man, his face was drawn with the lines of deep perplexity.

With a sinking heart, Boyd watched the old man pull a flask from his hip pocket and take a sup of the colorless liquid it contained, offering it a moment later to his companion.

"No, thanks," said Boyd quietly, bowing his head to conceal his anger. If the old man was going to get drunk at such a time as this—

But Rockwell's hand was still outstretched.

"Take it. It's water."

Boyd's flush of indignation changed instantly to a blush of confusion, and he accepted the bottle gratefully. One big mouthful of the almost boiling water, held lingeringly in his tortured throat, and he handed it back.

"It's wet, anyway," remarked Rockwell apologetically, pocketing the offending flask.

For a long time he lay there broiling in that fearful heat, apparently undecided what to do. Suddenly the sun was blotted out, and both men looked up to see a huge thunder-head which, unnoticed, had been gathering above them.

The sight of it galvanized Rockwell into swift action.

"Watch here till I get back!" he whispered while he made his way quickly to his horse. He spurred the unwilling animal to retrace its steps down the steep side hill to the bottom of the gulch, and was presently out of sight down its gravelly course.

In about twenty minutes he reappeared, just as a blinding flash of lightning and simultaneous thunder-clap announced a cloudburst imminent. Rockwell waved toward a big cave in a limestone wall at Boyd's

right, and both men urged their horses toward it. It luckily proved large enough to shelter men and horses together.

For a few moments there was utter silence, so intense that it seemed to press in upon the senses. This was relieved by another flash and crack of thunder, whose echo rolled and reverberated through the hills tremendously. Presently an ominous roar was heard, which grew until it seemed to fill the whole earth. A hailstone half as large as an egg came hurtling down through the air from an immense height, hitting a flat rock in front of the cave with a smack like a pistol shot, and bounced high in the air. More stones whizzed down and bounced, and then following another terrific thunder-bolt, the air was suddenly filled so full of hail that only a pulsing wall of white appeared outside the cave, like the endlessly plunging torrent of a thunderous cataract. The roar of the hail was deafening. Once, lightning struck so close to the men that the flash felt like a slap in the face, yet they heard no thunder. Flash followed flash so fast that it seemed one continuous glare of sputtering light. In thirty seconds coarse hail was piled inches deep on the ground. Then the hail ceased and was followed without pause by a terrific downrush of rain accompanied by a tearing, slashing wind. The rain came down not in drops, but in actual streams, whipped by the wind into sheets of suffocating spray and lashed furiously along the ground like drifting snow.

Suddenly the wind and rain stopped, leaving the senses numbed and strained, and the sun shone out brighter than ever. But the roar continued. The whole mountain side seemed rushing madly down to the bottom. The four inches of water poured forth in two or three minutes by the cloudburst was rapidly collecting in the gullies, transforming them from arid courses into raging, foaming rivers. Roaring black water already filled the narrow V-shaped ravine below the cave to a depth of a dozen feet. In a few minutes this stream began to subside where it passed the two men, and they watched the torrent as it poured forth upon the valley, filling the dry washes and spreading beyond their borders. As the flood, augmented enormously by huge streams from other cañons, approached the flat bottom of the valley it spread out still farther, forming a white expanse of

water half a mile wide and perhaps a mile or so long. All afternoon and until dark, the men could see this great white sheet slowly moving down the broad valley toward Rush Lake.

Noticing little pools of clear water standing in hollow places on the surface of the rocks near them, the two men drank their fill. Thirst quenched, the memory of the bacon smell asserted itself, and they were hungry.

The grim lines of Rockwell's set face seemed relaxed a bit. The hunting instincts were temporarily at rest. He grew talkative.

"Don't b'lieve our man over the hill hankers to make tracks, so he won't travel while it's muddy. Wished we'd brought a bite along," he finished almost wistfully.

Boyd could see no reason for delaying the capture, but traditions of the frontier forbade a youngster obtruding his views on a chief, so he began to unbuckle his saddle-bags.

"I brought a little flour and bacon, if we've got time to cook it," he said.

Rockwell noted the involuntary inflection which betrayed the feeling that they did not have time.

"No need to hurry now, Boyd. I'll get some of that rat's-nest yonder while you mix a couple o' biscuits," and he walked toward the rear of the cavern where a wood-rat had accumulated a huge pile of cedar-twigs, horse droppings, rabbit skulls and other nondescript but inflammable articles, in the center of which was the beast's wool-lined nest.

In a moment the old man returned with an armful of the stuff. While the nest was being raided Boyd had washed his hands in a rock basin, wiping them dry on his shirt, and had dipped a double-handful of water from another basin and poured it into the sack containing flour mixed with baking powder. Then with his fingers he stirred the water until all the flour it could take up was rolled into a ball of stiff dough. Dividing this into two parts and selecting two forked sticks from Rockwell's bundle, he placed a chunk of dough on the twin prongs of each stick.



BY THIS time Rockwell had kindled a good-sized blaze. Squatting on his heels each man held his loaded stick against the heat of the flame until the lumps of dough slowly expanded

and browned into beautiful biscuits. These were split and placed crust down in the ashes at the edge of the fire. Then thick slices of juicy bacon were impaled on the forked sticks and held in the heat over the upturned faces of the divided biscuits. Mouths watered hungrily while the savory bacon broiled and sizzled and dripped on to the toasting bread.

With this gustatory preparation, the men fell to and ate, and as they ate they drank again. Only those who have known the torment of thirst and hunger in waste places can quite appreciate the surpassing enjoyment which water and food can give those who suffer in the desert for want of them.

While this feast was being cooked and eaten, the horses had patiently maneuvered out on to the muddy side hill in spite of the cruel impediment of dragging reins, and were now cropping the scattered bunch-grass, jingling their bridle-bits in noisy satisfaction. Their masters lay in the shade of the rocks in silence. Finally Boyd could stand it no longer.

"Why not get him now?" he asked evenly, but something in his manner was slightly suggestive of a locomotive easing off a bit through the safety-valve.

"Young feller," returned Rockwell mildly, and his neutral tones presaged neither apology nor rebuke. "We'll do no such a — thing. That's a mighty smart feller we're dealing with. Did you notice those cedar boughs he's drug down to the spring? He's planning to stay and corral in that water. He needs a horse. Think he'd start makin' that corral 'fore the gold was hid up? Mighty slim chance to find it before the storm. None a-tall now. I admit I'm stumped."

Having finished this record-breaking announcement of his thoughts, Rockwell lay a long while in the steaming afternoon heat, gazing intently at nothing.

Boyd quickly saw what his chief was driving at, and had nothing to say. He realized that to arrest their man now would be playing into his hand. Rockwell's reasoning was sound, and Boyd cursed the stubborn obtuseness which had prevented him from seeing before that the first thing such an outlaw would think of doing would be to hide the only sure evidence to link him with the crime. Then, confident that no one would find whatever trace might have been left by the wrapped feet before a

friendly wind or rain would obliterate forever that connection between Chokecherry Springs and Point Lookout, he could wait securely for excitement and pursuit to die out.

But if the extremely improbable happened, and he were found and arrested, he could boldly claim an acquittal for lack of evidence against himself and later return and dig up his fortune. On the other hand, if his pursuers failed to trail him to his rendezvous, and no doubt, at that moment he was chuckling over the luck which had sent the cloudburst to wipe out tracks, then he could pleasantly engage his time for a few days in the capture and breaking of one of the band of wild horses which watered at the spring, and finally ride away with his loot in safety.

While Boyd was studying all this out, Rockwell was carefully considering every possibility that the man he was after was not the man now at the cabin, but finally decided that his first conclusion was right. He had rushed down to the mouth of Chokecherry Hollow just before the storm, and, without showing himself to the occupant of the cabin, had been able to determine satisfactorily that the wrapped feet had gone up the dusty horse-trail toward the springs, and that nothing had come down the cañon since those tracks had been made. He had noted the apparent commencement of preparations to catch a needed horse. The direct course of the tracks to the water and cabin, and the evidence of a supply of food pointed obviously to the fact that the man had been there before, and now counted on staying there for a while.

At last Rockwell straightened up and turned to his companion.

"Boyd, we've got to watch him until he figgers it's safe to dig up that gold and leave. No need to watch close until he finishes that corral and ketches a horse, but I'll have to stay here all the time. Leave what grub you brought and my saddle blanket, and when it's dark you'd better take the horses back to Sharp's. It's the nearest water. Every night you come to this place with grub and water and to see if I need help."

Boyd was left to remove the saddle blanket while Rockwell returned to the weather-beaten ledge overlooking the Springs. The young man went about his

task with leaden spirits, and when sundown finally arrived, set out for Vernon in gloomy disappointment. All his instincts rebelled against the prospects of his part in the long period of waiting until the bandit got ready to uncover his loot.

A week passed, and during that time Rockwell spent the monotonous days in the punishing heat of his lonely post, watching the man below him, who, all unconscious of his watcher, was slowly building about the spring a small, strong corral made of cedar boughs which he was cutting and dragging from a grove of the scrubby trees at some distance from the cabin.

When the appearance and rapid approach of a long line of dust on the flat below the mouth of the little cañon signaled the coming of the horses on the run to their watering place, the man ceased his work and disappeared. On their arrival the horses were checked by the strange sight, and held back in fearful apprehension.

With head high and tail held out like a great black plume, and with eyes, ears and nostrils expressing tense vigilance for signs of danger, the magnificent bay leader pranced with long, graceful strides in a wide arc around the place, his streaming black mane waving gently up and down with the rhythmic movements. Occasionally he paused in his circling to snort his alarm at the lurking evil he suspected in the unusual object about the water-hole, his tense body ready to dash away to the safety of the desert reaches at the slightest movement in that fearsome circle of high-piled cedar boughs.

Seeing no sign of enemies, and driven at last to desperation by a two-day thirst and the smell of the water, the horses finally crowded in, drank hurriedly, dashed out and clattered away down the gulch in a cloud of dust. Then the man came out from his hiding place and resumed his work.

At the end of a week of watching, the corral was completed, and Rockwell was conscious of a rising excitement as his nerves anticipated the events soon to follow which would terminate those terrible days of waiting. He sent Boyd back to Vernon that night with joy in his heart by telling him to come thereafter with two horses instead of one.

On the following day Rockwell watched with keen expectancy for the dust line betokening the approach of the horses. It

was their day for a drink. They had now become accustomed to the corral about the water, and although they kept a sharp lookout, and always ran swiftly away after their drink, it was plain that they no longer feared a trap there.

At last the expected white line came streaking across the gray plain toward the mouth of the cañon, and presently the handsome bay stallion appeared at the head of the column of sweating, dust-covered cayuses. He paused for one loud snort at the narrow opening of the corral, over which a chokecherry pole had been tied, and satisfied that it startled nothing into life about the enclosure, cautiously proceeded to enter.

No sooner had his rump passed the sides of the gateway than the man, who had remained cleverly concealed until then, jumped to the entrance, and quick as lightning, swung a large cedar bough against the chokecherry pole, completely closing the opening. The other horses fled out of the cañon on to the valley plain like bird-shot from a chokebore. They sought another watering place.

The red stallion, scared out of his wits for the moment, leaped clear over the water hole to the opposite side of the corral, and with long, crouching steps paced up one way along the high wall and then down the other, as though seeking a low place over which to vault. Finding none, he turned directly toward his captor, his eyes and nostrils wide with fright. Just for an instant he stood there poised, the skin of his powerful neck wrinkled by the strain of his posture, his hard muscles tensed, and the whites of his wild eyes gleaming. Then, with a little squeal of mingled rage and fear, he charged the tall, dark man, who advanced crouching to meet him, arms outstretched.

In the instant of the encounter the horse was on his hind legs, striking out at his foe with his front feet, mouth wide open. Like a panther the man leaped in past those vicious feet and grasped the animal's soft nose with one strong hand, and his left ear with the other. Uttering a squeal of desperation the maddened horse reared high in the air, thrashing futilely at his clinging antagonist with his strong front legs. But the man hung on, and the horse, unable to bear the torture of such a weight hanging to his sensitive ear, soon surrendered and stood with head held down, his glorious body trembling with fear and exertion,

ready to fly into murderous action the instant he felt those cruel fingers relax their punishing grip.

The horse began to step from side to side, partly to balance himself, and partly to jockey for advantage, as a wrestler on a mat, and all the while gently swinging his head up and down as if to keep posted on the endurance of his tormentor's grip. Any sudden action was checked in its inception by a vicious twist of nose or ear. Gradually, and without the horse's noticing it, the man began to direct the animal's movements, and after perhaps thirty minutes maneuvering, worked him up to the place in the wall where he had been concealed. Making no sudden movement which might startle the animal's tense nerves, the man carefully reached out with his foot to a rawhide hackamore, and as carefully dragged it within reach. Then he slowly released his hold on the stallion's nose, accompanying that action with a gradually increasing twist of the ear, and cautiously reached down with his free hand and grasped the hackamore. With infinite patience and caution he drew it up to the animal's face and touched him with it, holding it there for a long time to accustom the horse's nerves to its presence and feel. Then he gently placed it on the stallion's head.

Tying the short end of the rope attached to the hackamore securely around the horse's neck, and making sure of his hold on the other end, he let go his grip on the ear. For a moment the horse didn't realize what had happened. Then, suddenly sensing that his ear was free, he reared and wheeled to get away. But the man braced himself to hold, and catching the maverick in the middle of his turn, while his front feet were in the air, jerked him on his back. The horse scrambled to his feet and rushed at the man, rearing and flailing out with his front feet like a boxer, but the man nimbly stepped aside and threw the animal again on his back.

This was repeated until the stallion despaired of his ability to cope with his tormentor. He had never before met any living thing that could long resist his strength and speed, but this antagonist possessed skill and trickery which so far transcended anything in his experience that he finally decided he must submit to it. Presently he allowed himself to be led about the corral.

Gradually the relationship of horse and master began to take form as a new conception in his horse brain. But the sense of subjection to this master was based upon fear of those cruel hands and the treacherous power in that tormenting rope. Back in his head lurked the wicked thought that if just once he could escape their hold, he would kick, bite and strike that master to destruction.

From his aerial perch Rockwell looked down on this performance in admiration.

"Feller that kin lick a range stallion with his bare hands kin whip a grizzly," he whispered to himself.

All afternoon he watched the man leading the maverick about the corral, teaching him submission and fear of the consequence of insubordination.

Night came, and Rockwell waited impatiently for Boyd to come. Perhaps not tomorrow, he thought, but surely in a very short time now, this skilful horseman at the cabin would seek out the hiding place of the stolen treasure to take it to a place where he could spend it.

But Boyd did not come.

Rockwell slept but little that night, disquieted by the young man's failure to arrive. And another thought, vaguely repeated in the moments of his uneasy sleep, disturbed him. It was possible to ride from Chokecherry to Salt Lake City in one day. Or in one night, if a man preferred not to be seen making the trip. Accustomed to trailing men down in the desert, the attempt to follow any one where individual tracks were blotted out in the maze of a city's much used thoroughfares seemed most futile to Rockwell. In his primitive mind to let a criminal get into a city was equivalent to losing him.

All the next day Rockwell watched the man below continue his process of forcing the wild, free spirit of the maverick to yield to his will. The legs with grip of steel and the head which never lost its sense of balance soon taught the futility of bucking and running, and the vicious and unsparing cuts of a heavy rawhide quirt made plain the foolishness of anything but prompt obedience to the rider's desire.

Toward evening Rockwell returned to the cave and began tearing up his saddle blanket. Removing his boots, he carefully wrapped his feet with the strips of cloth. He had concluded that hereafter it was necessary to watch lest his quarry depart

at night, and in order to leave no tracks of his vigil at close range, had decided to use the outlaw's own method of making none.

With a bit of charcoal he scrawled a terse message to Boyd on a piece of paper and placed it under his boots. Then pocketing the scanty remainder of food, he went back to his post.

When the dusk of evening obscured the details of the landscape, he ventured cautiously down a draw leading to the bottom of the gulch near the cabin, taking advantage of the cover offered by the scattering serviceberry bushes in its course.

Later, when the darkness deepened, he moved noiselessly past the cabin and down to the corral where he could watch the flickering light in the cabin's fire-place, and hear the restless horse stamping and pawing in the despair of his hopeless longing for freedom.

Finally the fire-light died out in the cabin, and Rockwell decided that his man had gone to bed. But Rockwell did not sleep, for he realized that both his life and the success of his undertaking might depend on his staying awake. He was assisted in this determination to keep his eyes open by the uncomfortable chill of the night breeze.

Confident that the morrow would bring the events so long awaited, and realizing that he must be at close range to take a hand in them in case Boyd hadn't yet arrived with the horses, he went back over the ridge to the cave. Boyd hadn't been there.

Genuinely apprehensive now, Rockwell nevertheless kindled a little fire and in its dim light removed the paper from under the boots, crossed out the first message and slowly printed this order on the opposite side:

WATCH AT ROCK
WHEN YOU SEE ME WITH MAN
COME WITH HORSES

Replacing the paper under the boots, Rockwell returned to the top of the ridge just as a faint lightening of the darkness in the northeast betokened the near approach of daylight. The old man descended the little draw in the darkness until within fifty yards of the cabin, where he stopped behind a large serviceberry bush. Here, he concluded, was the spot where he must remain concealed during the day. Through the

dense willowy growth of the bush he could see without being seen.

For a long time after sunrise the man in the cabin failed to put in an appearance. When he finally came out, he was carrying an old blanket on his arm. He made directly for the horse in the corral, and after much profanity and abuse, succeeded in placing the folded blanket on the terrified animal's back, securing it there with a surcingle he had been making.

Having adjusted the blanket to his liking, the man mounted and rode the horse around until apparently satisfied that the stallion would make no further objections to the new gear. Then he spent the rest of the day grazing the horse on patches of bunch grass. The famished maverick was by this time willing to eat whenever opportunity afforded.

During the heat of the day Rockwell suffered terribly from thirst and desire for sleep. But he persevered in his determination to remain awake, fearful lest the moment his eyes closed he would drop off into a sound slumber that would be fatal.

When the friendly darkness of another night came he crept down to the corral and got a soul-satisfying drink from the spring. Not daring to return to the cave to see if Boyd had come, lest at any time the man in the cabin arise and take his departure, Rockwell began to walk slowly up and down the gravel wash running past the corral where he knew his padded feet would make no marks.

He remained on his legs all night, knowing that the moment he sat down his eyes would close. Weak from lack of food and sleep, he was scarcely conscious of the motion of his legs. He seemed to be walking on air.

At the first hint of daylight he was back at his place behind the serviceberry bush, clenching his jaws and steeling his nerves to meet the day's demand for alert watchfulness, when the desire for sleep had become an agony. Not until noon did the sight of smoke from the cabin chimney and the tantalizing smell of frying bacon inform him that his man had arisen.

When the fellow came out he again cinched the blanket on his horse, and rode directly to the bunch grass on the hillside. There he dismounted and holding fast to the animal's rope, allowed him to graze the entire afternoon. Dizzy with suffering and

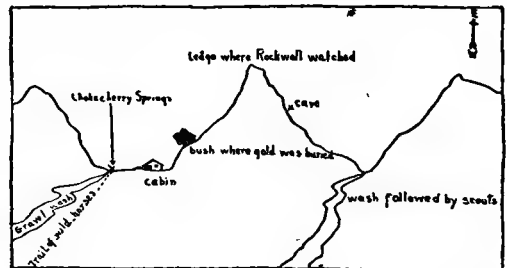
weakness, to keep awake and watch during this peaceful monotony was the greatest trial of all for Rockwell. His eyes would no longer focus except when urged, so that a haze seemed to envelop everything, and only by a great effort of the will could he distinguish objects.

Just before sundown the man rode back to the corral and tied up his horse. Rockwell's nerves tingled when he perceived that the fellow left the horse without removing the blanket.

The man entered the cabin, and soon the odor of food cooking indicated that he was taking a meal. In a few minutes he reappeared carrying an old shovel.

Rockwell was now too excited to be conscious of his desperate plight. His quickened nerves stilled the cries of his tortured body for food and sleep, and out of its weakness drafted the last vital reserves to make him for the moment fit and alert.

The man proceeded directly toward the spot where Rockwell was hiding. At first the old man, peering intently through the



tiny interstices of the lower part of his serviceberry bush, refused to be alarmed, but as the approach continued he nervously pulled out his cap and ball pistol and made sure that the cap was in place.

Hesitating for just a moment while he swiftly scanned the landscape in every direction, the tall man continued his course. There was now no possibility for Rockwell to move without being discovered, and if the man kept on he was certain to come directly upon the old scout. Rockwell cursed savagely at the luck that was robbing him of victory in the very moment of its achievement.

The man had now reached the opposite side of the serviceberry bush behind which Rockwell, with a snarl on his haggard face and tense hand gripping the big pistol, was crouched ready for the meeting.

But the man didn't come around the bush.

Presently Rockwell heard the shovel scraping in the dirt, and a moment later came the soft thumping of retreating footsteps. Arising, he saw the tall man going away with something in a gunny sack slung over his shoulder. Rockwell waited no longer.

"You're my man!" he squealed, jumping around the bush, gun held ready for action.

The startled man dropped his sack and whirled about, completely taken off his guard. He made no effort to reach for the gun which dangled at his hip. To do so meant suicide. Beastly fear at this sudden apparition of his dreaded adversary played havoc with his dark countenance, and the quick effort to assume the appearance of outraged innocence only succeeded in contorting his momentarily uncontrollable features into a series of inane smirks. But he quickly recovered himself and achieved the look of bold indifference noticeable on the face of a trapped coyote.

"Whatcha tryin' tuh do here, pard?" he drawled in well simulated tones of remonstrance, but his mouth twisted with fear and murderous desire as he spoke.

The question was ignored.

"Unbuckle that belt an' toss it over here!" rasped his captor's shrill voice.

The man hesitated.

"Git that belt off or I'll shoot guts all over the hillside!"

The tall man was conscious of a ticklish feeling in the region of his solar plexus as he made haste to toss over the belt on which hung his pistol.

"What's in that sack?" demanded Rockwell.

A cunning gleam came into the prisoner's eyes. No one could prove that he had brought the gold there.

"That's gold," he answered.

"Where did you get it?"

"I never seen it before. Man that left when I come told me he buried it here."

"When did you come here?"

"Three days ago."

Rockwell knew that no one had either come to or departed from the place in the previous ten days.

"Pick up that sack and march to the cabin," he ordered, at the same time securing his captive's pistol and holster at his feet.

Having already acquired a great respect

for his prisoner's resourcefulness, and aware of his own desperate weakness, Rockwell kept at a healthy distance behind the man carrying the sack. Fearing a possible rifle in the cabin, the old man halted his captive in the center of a clear space near the little shack and ordered him to sit down there. Rockwell walked on to the cabin and braced himself against a wall to sustain an upright posture.

The prisoner noted this evidence of faintness, and then it occurred to him that he had been watched for some time. His captor had probably trailed him to his hiding-place and therefore knew so much that safety lay only in escape. But a glance of swift appraisal at the exhaustion portrayed in Rockwell's sunken eyes and sharply protruding cheek-bones, and the outlaw allowed his teeth to show in a wolfish grin of anticipation. His chance was bound to soon come when the old man could no longer sustain unceasing vigilance. The captive regarded his own well-nourished strength with satisfaction and confidence.



THE sun had now disappeared in the red haze enveloping the long desert ranges which lay like upturned cross-cut saws on the far western horizon. Rockwell sensed the approach of darkness with despair. The excitement which had sustained him during the capture had passed and a deadly reaction set in which left him trembling with weakness and nausea.

He glanced hopelessly up at the rock on the ridge for sight of Boyd, realizing as he did that had the young man been there to watch he would already have appeared with the horses. The uneasy feeling that fatal harm had befallen Boyd somewhere between Vernon and the Boulder mountains, which had been tormenting Rockwell for several days, now deepened into conviction in his mind. He considered that his friend Sharp would long ago have sent relief if he knew Boyd hadn't been in communication with Rockwell for four days.

Forcing his jaded faculties to try to arrive at a possible course of action to pursue before the gathering darkness closed in upon him, Rockwell came to a full realization of his desperate situation. To try to walk his man to Vernon was out of the question. Aside from the practical certainty of the prisoner's escape in the darkness, Rockwell

knew that he himself could neither walk nor negotiate the bronco. The thought of tying his prisoner down for the night was dismissed. Rockwell hadn't much confidence that any rope or strap he might find in the cabin would be able to hold such a man for long. And further, he realized that in his weakened condition it was suicide to get within arm's reach of the man.

Rockwell glanced for an instant at his prisoner, who returned the look with a cunning and confident leer. Rockwell realized that he was at the end of his physical resources, that it was only a matter of moments until his knees would give way, and that as soon as he sank down his eyes would close in sleep. One glance at his captive's dark, watchful face made plain what would happen in that event.

In all his operations against lawless men it had been a matter of pride and principle with Rockwell to capture by strategy and bring his man in alive, but now into his distraught mind came the thought that he must kill this one. To do so meant safety, food and sleep. There was no other way. To try to guard the man until uncertain relief came from Vernon meant certain death.

Rockwell had killed a number of bad-men in his career, but always he had shot in self-defense. Always the outlaw had gone down after having been first to reach for his gun. When Rockwell finally brought his mind up to the point of actually shooting to death this unarmed man sitting out there on the sack of gold, he realized that he couldn't do it. It would be murder.

All unconscious of the battle going on in his captor's mind, the prisoner, in his exuberance of confidence, had been baiting the old man about his long, braided hair and his reputed supernatural immunity from bullets.

"Bet it's all a bluff. Bet yuh dassen't hand me my pistol an' give me an even break," he was saying, mockingly.

In full possession of his faculties, Rockwell would not only have ignored such a proposal, but would have administered such a rebuke as would have stopped further remarks. But now this suggestion beat in upon his dizzy brain with irresistible force. Why not end it that way, he questioned. His resistance was at such a low ebb that he was ready to undertake any crazy way out of the insufferable agony. That in his condition he had no chance at all in com-

petition of speed and skill with his fresh young antagonist, was a consideration forced from Rockwell's mind by the overwhelming pressure of desire to end his suffering one way or another. His flesh and blood could endure no longer. If his prisoner was killed, then he could go to sleep. If he himself were killed, he would be out of present misery. Again he listened to the low, mocking tones of the prisoner.

"Jist toss over my belt an' I'll buckle it on. Then we'll stand up with arms folded, an' when I say 'Go!' we'll both draw," he was wheedling.

Rockwell picked up the belt with its dangling holster and was on the point of complying with the request, when he was arrested by the sound of a horse's feet descending the opposite hillside, and on looking up he could dimly perceive through the dusk a horseman approaching. It was Boyd! Rockwell dropped the belt to the ground.

The sight of relief stiffened his trembling knees and steadied his reeling brain. When Boyd came up, Rockwell looked in silence at the young man's hideously swelled and livid face. Then he asked—

"Where's the other horse?"

His voice sounded far away to his own ears.

"Ole Sundown stepped in a badger hole an' broke his neck," answered Boyd thickly.

"When?"

"Several nights ago, I don't know how many." Then huskily, "Where's the water?"

Rockwell pointed to the corral, and Boyd started for it immediately.

"Get a bucket in the cabin and bring me some," Rockwell called weakly after him.

Boyd's few words had been sufficient to tell the whole story to Rockwell—the eager ride in the darkness across the treacherous plain to learn of the day's developments, the violent fall from the keeling horse, and the dazed wandering in the desert until returning memory directed him back to his horses.

After placing his horse in the corral with the maverick, Boyd returned bringing Rockwell a drink of water. Taking counsel as to the best way to spend the night, Rockwell sent Boyd into the cabin to rebuild the fire. He ordered the now silent and crest-fallen prisoner to pick up the gold and carry

it into the cabin. Then he made the captive sit down in the only chair the shack afforded. In the light of the blazing fireplace Rockwell untied the rawhide thongs from a bundle which the outlaw had evidently prepared for his journey, and with Boyd holding a pistol ready for action, proceeded to tie the outlaw's hands behind his back and then to the chair as securely as possible.

This done, Rockwell unrolled the prisoner's bundle disclosing a quantity of cooked food. Inviting Boyd to help himself, Rockwell proceeded to end the three-day famine. When he had finished eating, he sat down on the edge of the bunk. Food and the warmth of the cabin produced heavy drowsiness. Too stupefied with sleep to care whether the prisoner heard or not, he said to Boyd,

"I'm done up, Boyd, and I'm going to sleep. Watch that feller like a cat, because he may work loose. If he makes a break to get away, shoot 'im. Wake me in four hours."

Then Rockwell lay back on the bed, and pulling a quilt over himself, was instantly sound asleep, his open mouth and bloodless, sunken features showing in the ghostly flickering of the firelight like the face of a dead man. The prisoner in his chair greeted Rockwell's announcement with a low, derisive chuckle which somehow seemed expressive of the savage use he would make of opportunity when the tables were turned on his captors.

From the cover of shadow enveloping his face the outlaw scrutinized the newcomer keenly and decided his chances for escape were still very good. Boyd looked as near dead as Rockwell had been. There was a difference, however, for the pain in Boyd's swollen face would have prevented sleep had opportunity afforded.

Presently the prisoner cautiously began to try the thongs which held his hands. After a long time he succeeded in freeing them, exercising such patient skill and care in doing so that Boyd, stupefied with suffering and fatigue, failed to notice the performance.

For some time the prisoner sat perfectly still, holding his arms in the old position behind his back, while he carefully estimated the chances for securing a pistol and killing his captors. Rockwell's gun was beneath the quilt which was gently moving with his stertorous breathing. To pull back the

cover, locate the holster and jerk out the gun were too many operations to perform before Boyd would collect his wits and get his pistol into action. To risk a tussle with Boyd for his gun would only invite flaming death from Rockwell's hand.

Then the prisoner nearly yelped aloud in the ecstasy of an inspiration. Thereafter he sat very still, watching Boyd with feline eyes. Presently the fire began to die down and Boyd leaned over to replenish it from the wood-box. Like a flash the prisoner was at the door jerking it open, and was gone in the darkness.

Boyd yelled at Rockwell, and then was out after the escaping man, shooting wildly at the form which he saw only for an instant dashing away up the gulch. Before he was awake, Rockwell had tumbled on to the floor and was staggering blindly out after Boyd, struggling to drive sleep from his dazed senses, and trying to get a grip on the situation. Why were they going up the wash instead of down it to the corral and the horses?

Urging his old legs to still greater exertion he hurried after Boyd to ask where he had last seen the outlaw. But the distance between them was too great, and suddenly warned by his rousing faculties to look out for a trick to lead them away from the horses, he turned back, and moving silently on his wrapped feet, hurried down toward the corral.

The prisoner, in the mean time, having stepped behind a bush to let his stumbling, sleep-dazed pursuers pass, and to remove his shoes, had dashed back to the cabin, retrieved the gold, and then had hurried on down toward the corral. Pulling aside the cedar branch which closed the gateway, he listened a moment, and being reassured by the sound of some one cursing and stumbling about far up the rocky gulch, laughed contemptuously.

To get away with both horses was the tactical stroke which would at once leave his enemies unable to follow, and furnish himself with the power to travel fast and far. Having already decided that the old saddle horse would lead better than his bronco, and being certain of his mastery of the maverick, he quickly located the saddle where Boyd had thrown it and cinched it on the stallion. Then he tied the package of gold securely behind the cantle of the saddle, and grasping the rope

attached to Rockwell's horse, mounted.

Frightened by the unusual gear cinched on his back and by the reckless haste with which he was being handled, the stallion gave way to an impulse of rage and fear and dashed wildly toward the open gateway of the corral. Letting go the rope tied to the horse he intended to lead and giving his whole attention to getting control of the one he was riding, the man forgot about the chokecherry pole over the gateway. As the horse lunged through the opening, the man's head struck the pole with stunning force. The reins held tightly in his hand slipped out of the nerveless grasp, and his body gently slumped off at the side.

Arriving at that moment, Rockwell dimly saw what was happening, and calling to Boyd, rushed forward to capture the falling man. But one of the prisoner's feet remained wedged in the stirrup, and then the running bronco, startled into wild lunging by the queerly shifting weight on his back, sensed his hoped-for opportunity. The hated master was within reach of his heels. His hind feet struck the dragging form with a smack like that of a wide-swinging bat hitting a baseball. Racing in blind madness back

and forth through the scattered boulders and tangled growths of sagebrush, the crazed horse kept up that awful battery, kicking the dragging body into utter formlessness.

Gradually the cinch was loosened by the terrific strain, and the saddle began to turn and slip back. Struggling furiously, the stallion kicked the outfit off, and then, sense of direction and purpose returning with the realization of freedom, he broke into the old familiar trail and raced for the desert. After a while, far down on the flat, the wild, screaming whinny of the stallion could be heard, calling imperiously to his leaderless band.

Two days later Rockwell and Boyd arrived at Faust station to deliver the stolen gold back to the Overland Mail. Doc Faust met them with happy relief manifest on his face and a rapid fire of eager questions which soon elicited the high spots of their adventures. Hunger for news satisfied, Doc Faust paused to examine Boyd's injured face.

"Healing nicely!" was his optimistic comment. "What did you put on it?" he inquired.

"Found some Thribble H in the cabin," replied Rockwell laconically.

THE LAST HARBOR

by Helen Gilchrist Ives

NOW the men who shipped aboard of me in other days were these:
 Andy Mack of Gloucester, Hernandean from Quebec,
 And "Freshwater" Kilmanton, and "Salt Sam" Peck,
 And skipper Byce and young Byce who walked the after deck.
 But they're gone, and I lie listening to old voices from the seas.

And sun-rotting at a dock is no decent death to die!
 If tides would lift me high enough, and rotten ropes would break,
 I'd run a last, high, windy course for old time's sake;
 Old hands upon my tiller and new foam in my wake,
 Out where white-rimmed water hills race to meet the sky.

Lifted on the crest of them, I'd face the yellow sun,
 And racing down their farther slopes, I'd plunge through foaming green,
 Sinking slow, unbroken, like a stately-stepping queen,
 Down to still, dark waters the sun has never seen,
 And never ship may find them till her last voyage is done.

Andy Mack's at rest out there, a hundred fathom down,
 And young Byce is with him, and they'd cheer to see me ride
 Past the reach of hungry waves, below the lowest tide,
 Into some green, weedy harbor of the deep sea's under side,
 Where the Lord gives peace to sailor men and good ships when they drown!



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who have never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of heaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS comrade is a woman-but she's spent ten years in the North, with seven round trips back and forth, and many old-timers will recognize her name. The following is part of a letter concerning accuracy in local color of fiction stories about Alaska:

San Diego, California.

It happened during the Seattle, Alaska, Yukon Exposition (some name). About fifty or one hundred "sour doughs." We're gathered about the publicity desk in the Alaska Bldg., talking it over. One man his hands deep in his pockets, his feet wide apart, his face deeply scarred by the freeze and thaw of many Winters, was telling us that he hadn't seen an apple, a piece of candy or a newspaper in ten years—when a dapper young Englishman, faultlessly attired, minced his way up to the desk and asked the publicity man for "all the literature he had on Alaska." When asked the question, he heartily denied all intention of going to Alaska. "Too bloody cold, don'cher know." He was just a magazine writer "don'tcher know," and wished his data

on Alaska to be correct, "absolutely correct, don't cher know."

The big sourdough forgot all about the apple, candy and newspaper, shoved his hands a little deeper in his pockets, shifted a sizable chew of tobacco from one cheek to the other and said, "Well, I'll be —."

My father was one of a party who pitched their tents, and made Camp-Fires on the sand-lots where San Francisco now stands. That was in '49. His children and grandchildren have built camp-fires in California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Mexico and Alaska.

It's in the blood and nothing looks, or smells, so good as a Camp-Fire to any of the clan.—BELLE DORMER.

SOMETHING concerning his story in this issue from Glynn Bennion:

Vernon, Utah.

The story is one my grandmother told me when I was a small boy. She is the woman mentioned therein. Several minor incidents have been added to make a connected yarn, and the catastrophe has

been monkeyed with a bit; otherwise I have stuck to history.

The Indian incident is literally true; old *Tabby Weepup* is quoted verbatim. The horse fight is one actually experienced while wrangling some of Uncle Sam's meanest outlaws at the old Remonte de Château Fer in late argument.

"Old Port" Rockwell was one of the greatest of that class of two-handed, lightning-witted, determined men who finally made the West unsafe for the gun-fighting gentry. I have sought to render an accurate description of the old scout, and men who knew him tell me I have succeeded.—GLYNN BENNION.

JUST by way of showing what a rough old time we poor editors have, here's a letter—anonymouse and probably from a woman—that whacks us from a new direction. I've omitted one sentence of it, which was a bit too strong for print, but you'll get the rotten general idea:

DEAR MR. EDITOR:—You ask for criticisms. Here's one: you lose me as a reader. Why? Because the tone of your magazine on women is passing the point of simply ignoring them, as you used to, or just taking them for granted; and is more and more showing what is more than aversion, what is becoming more like a sex-perversion. *Adventure* is becoming almost sex-morbid, indeed, is sex-morbid.

If you want to get hot about it, go to it, for on this point practically all of you are in the same boat as we in the office. You've made it mighty plain for years past that you do not want our stories filled up with love-interest, neither do we in the office, we've given you darned little of it and shall continue to give you darned little of it until the majority of you ask for more—which I judge, will not be for quite some little time. Here, by the way, is a letter that reached us in about the same mail as the anonymous one. We'll try not to sin again, comrade Goodsill, but sometimes it's awfully hard to turn down a rattling good story just because the woman element in it is a bit more prominent than we'd like to have it and too necessary to the plot to be cut down or taken out.

San Diego, California.

I protest with all my strength at the introduction of the "love" element in F. R. Buckley's story in the issue of September 20th.

I want to say at once that it is a good story, and I am sure that I am not alone in welcoming old *Bill Garfield* to the pages of *Adventure* with keen satisfaction. To my mind he is one of the finest conceptions to be found in this type of fiction. But! In this one instance Mr. Buckley has dragged in heart-interest to help out poor old *Bill* and the other fine he-men in his yarn, with the result, as far as I

am concerned, that for the first time, I have a strong taste of mush in my mouth after finishing an *Adventure* story.

I have congratulated myself for years in having a magazine that didn't do this sort of thing. You have never done it before. *Please* don't do it again. It is my loyalty that speaks as much or more than my selfish preference.—NORMAN GOODSILL.

Well, if I may make a suggestion to you who are indicted along with me by the anonymous lady, I move that Camp-Fire does not pass any resolution asking her to reconsider withdrawing from our circle, that we all try to be happy without her and that we hereby wave her an unregretful farewell by forgetting all about her and her odd little views on sex. I've consulted the Circulation Department and they are undauntedly confident that the magazine can keep right on going without her support.

But it's sort of hard to suit everybody, isn't it?

WRESTLING vs. ju-jutsu vs. boxing—here's another voice on a subject brought up some time ago:

Williamston, Michigan.

Mr. Wilson's inquiry concerning ju-jutsu vs. boxing has given me an excuse for talking at Camp-Fire. I am no expert on either, but have had some experience in an amateur-way in both as well as wrestling (catch-as-catch-can style), but if I may quote Farmer Burns as an authority, he claims that any expert (catch-as-catch-can) wrestler can easily handle the very best boxer or ju-jitsu man. He further claims that he personally has met and defeated Japan's best exponents of the art of ju-jutsu with nothing barred, not even the so called death-holds.—R. G. TURNER, D. C.

THIS letter was written in September, 1921, and the rumor of an Irishman who had become a religious in Burma or India was brought up at Camp-Fire, if I'm not mistaken, quite some time before that. Any of you with more data? And has comrade Holloway learned anything more in the meantime and if the other wearer of our "71" button is now among us won't he speak up?

New York.

Better light up and sit back nice and comfy. I don't write you often, so claim this privilege of writing you long. Having very recently been spewed out of —, that is, Cairo, Egypt, I find I am sort of out of touch. But here's the meat of my letter.

A WEEK ago, last Sunday to be exact, I was in the Penn Station waiting to take the train to Baltimore when a stranger with eyes fastened on my "71" offered his hand and called my attention to his

own lapel. That of course was "credentials" enough for me. He had traveled some, I soon found out, and as was natural our conversation was of "the" magazine, past, present and future, and last but not least, Camp-Fire. Then came what cocked my ears.

"Say if you've lived any time in Burma you'd probably know something about this 'Irish Sayah.'" Then he mentioned the controversy that occurred some time ago—he couldn't recall the period—and I mentally kicked myself for being "somewhere" when that particular number was published. The joke of it is that the stranger's train was called just then and he rushed away before either of us had time to say more than "so long and good luck." When he had gone I sat back and laughed heartily. I hadn't even thought of learning his name and he had been equally remiss—so much for the hypnotic effect of "71."

I WAS in Meiktila, Upper Burma, in 1887 with an uncle, an Indian Government surveyor. I was a bit observant. I never heard of any "Irish Sayah" during the three years I was in Burma on that occasion, and yet I was very friendly with the pongyis—due to pagan blood of some sort, I guess, and knew the language better than most natives. (Few at that time were able to read and write their own language and I have often acted as letter-writer to them.)

I was in Burma again in 1902, shortly after my connection with the Boer war, and in Rangoon there were several "Engaleik pongyis" (usually besotted jockeys kicked off the race-course for some dirty work, and other such loafers). While I was in Meiktila—1903, I feel pretty sure—an "Irish Australian" pongyi—he sure had kissed the Blarney Stone—came there and raised by collections a sum of Rs. 25,000, roughly about \$8,000 at then rate of exchange. His Burmese name was U Dammalokkha, but his Irish name was said to be Colvin. It might have been anything else, however. I never conversed with him, but an old comrade of mine, a Mr. Wilks, had that somewhat doubtful honor and Mr. Wilks pronounced him "fake" clear through. After extracting from the poor rustics the aforementioned sum, he announced that the King of Siam had asked him to accept the position of head Sayah at Bangkok and he departed thither to inform his Siamese Majesty, so he plausibly explained, that, his heart being in Burma, he could not take the position. He never returned to Burma. He was in Burma for about a year and a half.

WHILE I was in Potchefstroom in 1905 I received news of still another "Irish pongyi," but no particulars accompanied the information. In fact, Mr. Wilks only mentioned it, when jokingly reminding me of U. Dammalokkha's successful coup a little earlier. In Boston in 1916 I had just returned from my third trip through the submarine zone (Baltimore to Alexandria with coal, oil and locomotive parts, thence with cottonseed to Bristol, England) when I received news from Burma of a third "Irish pongyi," a fellow named Collins. He was reported to have rejoined the army, promoted to sergeant in an Irish regiment, killed in action shortly afterwards.

THIS is all I know of the affair of the "Irish" sayah or pongyis either. When was "O'Rourke" in Burma? If it was during my time, I don't see how

I could have missed some knowledge of him. As I said before I was more than ordinarily intimate with the pongyis in many parts of Burma, due partly to the fact that I was efficient in the lingo, but more so to the fact that I had more than once protected them from insult on the part of Hindoos, principally the henna-bearded Moguls, who used to take a malicious delight in flinging mud at the begging-bowls and airing their slight knowledge of Burmese in obscene epithets.

As I say I am somewhat out of touch with events here for which lay the blame on my "itching foot" propensity but, if the matter has not been relegated to the store-house of insolvable mysteries, let me have the particulars and that means the period when this "O'Rourke" was in Burma and I'll dig up what there is about him. I am in regular correspondence with "old-timers" in Burma. Englishmen of King Thebaw's time, and if they don't know anything of O'Rourke then there is nothing to know. I mean that.—PHIL HOLLOWAY.

THIS comrade—and I think I can speak for all of Camp-Fire as well as myself—can be sure that he is welcome among us. If he feels he must take a seat where the light of the blaze does not fall on his face, that is his business and he is none the less welcome.

I wonder whether twenty-five years of right living doesn't wipe out any past. What more can any man do, and what right has any one to expect more of a man than is possible?

I'm not the Hoffman who was with the Ranger. I'm sorry. But I'd like to shake hands and I hope you find among us not only old friends but new ones. You are always welcome.

Anywhere in the World.

Above address may at first sound flippant, yet it is absolutely the truth. There are many men like myself—and they are scattered all over the world—and I want to say that like all the rest of my kind I do not want to sign my name. I have lived in the East twenty-five years and am not noticed. I have been successful during this time in living an entirely new life to that which I did down home.

READ your magazine for years and at Camp-Fire have met many men who were my friends years ago. And it sure is — that I can not stand right up on my hind legs and make myself known to you all. Yet, old pals, in spirit I am with you very much. During the years I have been East I married and lost the most wonderful woman in the world. Yet she is survived by the next most wonderful one, her daughter, and this girl thinks her Daddy is—well, you know. And I sure want to keep her thinking that way. She is all I have to tie to.

A few years ago I was back down home on a little trip and I met a "Mr. Hoffman" in company with a certain Ranger. If you are that same big clean *hombre*, don't let your mind wander back to any of the stories that were told that day, and after telling you of my daughter. I know that if you do, you won't be talking much. For this is a right small

world. As to Camp-Fire, can you imagine what it means to men like me? The memories it sings to us? And I say "us," for I know I am not alone—there are hundreds like me, strangers in a strange land, yet, through Camp-Fire, mighty close to home.

WHAT prompted me to write you was Frank Huston's comment on some person by the name of Bob Hickles claiming that his partner killed the "Apache Kid." Uncle Frank is right. The Kid died of smallpox, and I know! Sorry I can not go into details. I think you will understand. But he sure did die of smallpox of the most violent kind. He had a few friends who did all they could, but they did not dare bring a doctor to him and, believe me, he was not as bad as folks painted him. I knew him and have known him to do things which will go a long way toward helping him into the great beyond.

Somewhere some men are going to read this letter (that is, if you publish it) who will commence to think. Brothers, I greet you all. To most of you I have been dead twenty-five years, and to me you are the same. Just keep on reading "Camp-Fire," and if you must (like me) rush into print, be careful—some of you must have folks, maybe beautiful daughters like myself.

To you Mr. Hoffman I again apologize for not signing my name, but I know you will understand. Camp-Fire?—! it's Home-Fire.— — — — —

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Roy Snider rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Toronto, Canada.

Introducing myself to "Camp-Fire"—I was born at Toronto, went adrift shortly after I finished public school, and had drawn more or less wages in forty different States of the well known Union by the time I was twenty-five years old. My best friends maintain that I can't conscientiously call myself anything but a tramp, and maybe they're right.

ASIDE from that, I had a fairly interesting session in Cuba in 1898, passed nine awful months as a coal-passer in a Limejuice ship in 1902, and helped some misguided brown gentlemen to stage an unsuccessful revolution in 1903.

Nearly all out-of-doors things suit me pretty well and I've tried a good many of them, at least once. Prospected in Montana for a while, took to cooking for cattle outfits—when there were such institutions—and achieved a reputation as the first round-up cook to bake light bread, on the range, north of the Yellowstone. I'm frankly proud of the distinction and hope that it is merited.

A bum is one of the things I never wanted to be, but I never acquired the knack of holding down a job for very long, except that of private which I held for some time in the East Surrey Regiment, chiefly because I couldn't get a transfer to the American Army when Uncle Sam got started.

After I got my ticket in 1919, I returned to Toronto for the first time in seventeen years, determined to settle down. I'm still determined, but have made three trips across Canada, from Halifax to Vancouver, since becoming determined and have traveled a little north and south beside.

Next to the Army, the Great Lakes have received more of my attention than anything else has, I believe, and I don't know of anything that I like any better unless it would be an April day in Bermuda.—ROY SNIDER.

STILL some more about Comanche, the horse that came through the Custer massacre, correcting some data given by Earl H. Emmons in a previous issue. Ronald A. Foster of Indianapolis sends me a letter from F. H. Church of Lawrence, Kansas, to Fred Cunningham of Indianapolis enclosing a letter from Colonel Ezra B. Fuller to the *Lawrence Journal-World* in 1913, pointing out inaccuracies in an article in the *Kansas City Star* reprinted from the *Minneapolis Journal*. That letter follows:

Lawrence, Kansas. Feb., 4, 1913.
City Editor *Daily Journal World*,
Lawrence, Kansas.

DEAR SIR: Hastily replying to your letter of yesterday, I take pleasure in furnishing the following information regarding the horse, Comanche and the many inaccuracies in the enclosed clipping from the *K. C. Star* containing a reprint from the *Minneapolis Journal*.

I SAW the article in the *Star*, preserved the clipping for some time, with the view of making some comments upon it for the paper, but finally turned it over to Mr. Shradler, who writes more or less for the papers and who was also familiar with the truth regarding the horse and who promised to make a reply to the many inaccuracies.

Comanche was a Government horse that was ridden by Capt. Myles W. Keogh, Troop I, Seventh Cavalry. This horse was the only living thing found on the Custer battle-field and had been wounded in seven, not six, places, all however being flesh wounds. He was grazing when found and did not have to be carried as stated in the article. It is true as stated that Gen. Sturgis issued a regimental order that this horse should never again be ridden and that he should be paraded at every regimental parade, draped in mourning, and this order was carried out for several years or until Gen. Sturgis retired.

The horse marched overland from Fort Meade to Fort Riley with the Seventh Cavalry in 1888 and remained at this latter post until he died in 1892 or 1893. At any rate he died prior to the World's Fair in Chicago, as his mounted remains were exhibited there.

WHEN he died the matter of having his skeleton and skin mounted was discussed by the then Captain of Troop I, Henry J. Nowlan, who had some correspondence with Professor Dyche of the Kansas University regarding the work of having him mounted. At any rate Capt. Dyche came to Fort Riley and offered to mount him for a certain sum, the mounted remains to then be the property of the officers of the Seventh Cavalry, or that he would mount the remains, exhibit them at the

World's Fair with the collection from Kansas University and retain it with that collection in case the officers did not see fit to pay for the mounting (about \$400). The officers did not raise the money and the mounted remains have been at Lawrence ever since, except at the two expositions at Chicago and St. Louis, with the University collection.

I joined the Seventh Cavalry by transfer from the Eighth Cavalry just after the Custer Massacre and am familiar with the details. I was with the regiment until Comanche died.—EZRA B. FULLER, Lieut. Colonel.

SO FAR only three letters have come in saying that the writers had already read "The Sea Hawk," by Rafael Sabatini, before it was published by our magazine. Curiously enough, all had failed to see the plain statement—made in "Camp-Fire" of the issue in which the serial began and called to readers' attention by an asterisked note at the beginning of the story—that we were consciously and deliberately violating magazine custom by printing a story that had already appeared in book form in this country.

You will remember that we asked for your opinions on this experiment. Thus far there have been no letters (except the three from those who had not read our statement) against the experiment or saying the writers had read the story when a few thousand copies were scattered over the U. S. some years ago. However, there hasn't been time to get full returns.

THE situation has changed since we undertook the experiment. Following the success of his "Scaramouche," "Captain Blood," which appeared in our magazine, has since become a "best seller," Rafael Sabatini is very much in the public eye and people have been going to the libraries in search of earlier books by him. Two, I think, of the three who wrote in had thus recently read "The Sea Hawk." This sudden jump in the popularity of Mr. Sabatini's work makes rather an unfair test for our experiment. At least it's good to know that it is one of our writers' brigade who has attained this success—and largely through a story in our magazine.

THE Blue Bucket mine and the bad-men of Oregon—some information from a comrade who has been close to the facts:

Sand Point, Idaho.

I read a letter from a Camp-Fire comrade regarding Oregon, the bad, bad men who ranged

there once upon a time, and the much-famed Blue Bucket mine.

NOW I happened to be born near the Oregon line, in the State of Washington, something over 40 years ago, and I rode range over that section of the West from the day that I was half knee high to a duck until I became a man—at least in stature—and I knew, personally, as a boy, some of these same bad-men, and I saw them in action. Not alone that, but my grandfather and grandmother, with my mother, then a babe in arms, were with that little party that discovered the Blue Bucket mine. My grandfather had a chunk of gold which he took from those lost mines, while they were fleeing from the Indians, and, when a boy, I handled that same chunk of gold—upon special occasions, and under the watchful eye of its possessor. My grandmother was buried near where their wagons were burned, as the party was trying to work back to the Oregon Trail.

MY FATHER was an old-timer in that country, having fought Indians on the Rogue River in '54-'56, mined on the Althouse, in southern Oregon, and at Jacksonville and at Canyon City. We put in several Summers looking for the lost Blue Bucket mine, but, of course, we never found it. Neither did we ever find the little stream where the party stopped for water, and which grandfather described to us times without number. I doubt if the lost Blue Bucket mine is ever found. You see, that little party was lost, when they stumbled upon the gold; and when one is lost and fleeing for his life he is not very apt to pay much attention to the topography of the country over which he is traveling.

I HAVE also helped search for other lost mines, of which there seems legion, not one of which we ever found a trace of. And at the present time I have a rudely-drawn map of where \$20,000 lies buried. The money is part of some forty-odd thousand dollars taken from a Great Northern mail train over in Montana, 15 or 20 years ago. Two men held up the train and made their escape with the money. One of the robbers was afterward killed, the other dying in prison last Summer. They never told where this money was hid. I found the map, together with a letter, written in Swedish, concerning it, sealed up in a glass jar, in the walls of an old log house where one of the bandits had hid for a time before his capture. I hold a map of its location, but I have never yet been able to find that particular section of the country which fits in with the description given in the map. If I ever do locate a piece of God's green landscape that tallies with my diagram, I am going after that 20,000.

But enough about lost treasures.

WE WERE speaking of bad-men. I knew Hank Vaughan and I also saw him in action. Hank's first killing was a deputy sheriff. He was wanted for horse-stealing and when the sheriff and his deputy came upon Vaughan, asleep on the range early one morning, they covered him with their guns, then awoke him. Perhaps Hank was asleep; perhaps not. No one knows. He was lying upon his back in bed and at the command from the sheriff to "Stick 'em up," he complied—with disastrous results. Both hands were under his

coat, which he was using as a pillow, and when they came out each hand held a gun. The deputy was killed and the sheriff got a bullet through the jaw. I was with my father, in my brother-in-law's saloon, in Weston, Oregon, when Hank cleaned out the place. I was pitched unceremoniously behind the bar, from where I could not see much but from where I heard a plenty.

A FEW years ago I wrote a series of articles about the old West. One of those articles, published in the magazine section of the *Spokesman-Review*, describing Hank's greatest battle, occasioned not a little controversy among some of the old-timers around Spokane. But my version, taken at first hand, was true. Charlie Long, the Bake-Oven cowboy, who shot old Hank up, wintered with my father and me at our range shack on lower Crab Creek, nine years after the fight. My father cut a half bullet from Charlie's shoulder, using the only razor in camp as a surgeon's scalpel. The piece of lead was imbedded perhaps an inch below the surface. But Charlie never batted an eye during the rude operation.

Many a night, as the wind shrieked through the chinking of our cabin, accompanied by the staccato bark of the coyote and an occasional howl of a loafer wolf, have I sat and listened to Charlie tell of his great fight with the invincible Oregon bad-man.

PRINESVILLE, where the fight took place, was part of Hank's range those days. None cared to cross pistols with him. So when he wandered into a saloon one day, looking for a game of poker, he found none with sufficient temerity to accommodate him—until a quiet little man, drinking at the bar, accepted his challenge. They sat down upon the floor squaw-fashion. Hank, in a spirit of bravado perhaps, drew his sheath-knife and pinned Charlie's pants leg to the floor. Long not only followed Hank's lead but he nicked Vaughan's leg. With a roar Hank was on his feet, going for his gun. But Long was the quicker. Charlie's bullet, fired from the hip, caught Hank on the forehead, a glancing blow, and Vaughan went down. Charlie said he thought that he had killed him. But when Hank came up, he wiped the blood from his eyes with one hand and began firing with the other, in the meantime yelling and dancing about like an Indian at a war-dance. Charlie was wounded four times, two bullets putting his left arm out of commission for life. All of Long's bullets went wild, except two. Those two narrowly missed Hank's heart, and he was never the same man afterward. They say that he took water a number of times after that fight. The shot in the forehead injured his eye-sight, and he was never greatly feared any more.

THEY tell a story, down around Pendleton, of how Hank, while on one of his sprees, shot the boot heels off a tenderfoot's feet and then kept him dancing until he could dance no longer. But the laugh soon came the other way. The tenderfoot promptly armed himself with a sawed-off shotgun and went looking for Hank. He found him in a store buying a hat. Training the gun on the bad-man, he commanded him to dance. Hank complied. But in his nervousness the gun went off, getting Hank in the shoulder and laying out the merchant.

Hank was later killed by a horse falling with him on the streets of Pendleton. He requested those who picked him up to remove his boots. "Dad always said that I'd die with 'em on," he told them. "When I meet him in—I want to be barefooted."

Charlie Long was killed from ambush by George Smith, son of Okanogan Smith, for jumping a claim in the Okanogan country.

Well, I'd better ring off. If this is interesting enough, pass it on to the boys.—GEO. W. BIRD.

THIS just shows what happens to one language when it goes into another without getting naturalized:

Mexicali, B. C., Mexico.

Professor Cortina, of New York, in his *Twenty Lessons in Spanish*, places beneath the Spanish a literal, word-for-word translation in English. Today, just for curiosity, in addition to the usual translation of the sense, I have made one of that kind of a report from a Mexican section foreman to the roadmaster, which is attached.—M. A. FRAZIER, *Compania Del Ferrocarril Inter-California*.

"I put in knowledge of you that the day 7 of the present, at the 2 p. m., happened the accident of the upper part of the leg left at the terminate the upper part of the leg between the lower part of the leg.

"Coming the train who was doing the work bringing the machinery plow, between Kilometer 77 and 78 to the east C. D. Junction. In those moments was ceasing the work in where found themselves six laborers. At the instant got down four of them to the road, and remaining two on the machinery, handling a tie which they accommodated between the wing of the machinery and the cylinder of the wind; one of the two laborers before said who took hold of the end of the tie in order to place it against the cylinder. In those moments upon dumping the wind slid itself said tie, catching of the upper part of the leg to the said laborer against the valve of the cylinder of the wind, who spoke with voice high that him it was mashing.

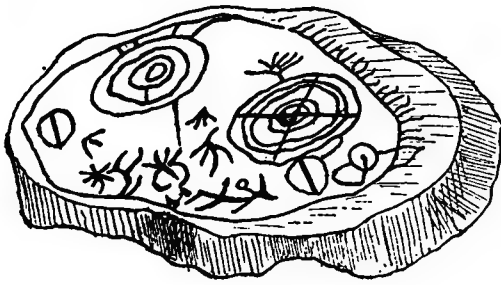
"At the instant came the roadmaster and rest of laborers in order to separate him from the danger. At the moment, seeing, the roadmaster, he (the roadmaster) informed himself of the accident, he ordered immediately the departure of the train urgently in order to conduct to the said accident to Yuma, Arizona, to the hospital.

"Terminating with the names of the laborers who still found themselves working: etc."

A CLIPPING from the *Farm Journal* of February, 1921, is sent us by comrade Gus Heiman of Breckenridge, Texas, showing what is presumably Indian writing on a stone the *Farm Journal* says lies close to Lake Tulare and is one of similar stones extending down from British Columbia through California to the border of Mexico. Each stone is said to be near some body of water or an abandoned water-hole. I asked the *Farm Journal* for permission to present the problem to Camp-Fire, as none

of their readers had been able to decipher the engravings. They courteously gave permission and told me that although they had received many letters, none of the solutions had been entirely satisfactory. Mr. Heiman does not doubt that some of Camp-Fire can read the writings. Neither do I, and while you're about it won't you tell the rest of us what these stones are, who wrote on them, and all the rest of it? We've found that there are plenty of scientists among is who are qualified to speak on such matters.

Here is a picture of the stone and the writing on it:



A COMRADE gives us interesting data on some old-timers and on places mentioned in F. R. Bechdolt's article:

Tucson, Arizona.

The Bechdolt stories have interested me because I have been living the greater part of my life over the ground upon which his Southwestern characters trod. My home, from 1910 until 1920 was at the little hamlet of San Simon, which place is on the Southern Pacific main line, fifteen miles west and sixty miles north of the New Mexican and Mexican International lines, respectively. You can readily see therefore that it would be very easy for me to have become familiar with the country which Mr. Bechdolt so accurately tells about.

IN THE story, "Passing of John Ringold," the town "Galeyville" was mentioned time after time, and I, though having heard of it many times, was unable to locate it definitely. I knew that it was in Turkey Creek cañon but could not tell whether it was near Paradise or not. I finally wrote to Judge J. C. Hancock at Paradise, whose daughter had been a schoolmate of mine, figuring that he had been in this country long enough to be able to tell me about it. He did, and had good reason to know, for he was one of the first men there, when the town began, and one of the last to leave when it came to an end in 1882. It was located about two miles down the cañon from where Paradise now stands in Turkey Creek cañon, and the only way one would know that there had ever been anything there is the fact that there is an old slag-dump where the

smelter was. And down the cañon not far, on the edge of the creek bed, are many mounds, the Boot Hill, I suppose, of Galeyville.

DOWN in San Simon, I own eight lots, which at one time were a part of the graveyard, the Boot Hill of San Simon, where lie many of the S. P. telegraph operators, they whom Geronimo killed when he couldn't find any one else, and the telegraph office at San Simon still has in its walls innumerable puttied-up bullet-holes. Rotten shooting, I fear, in some cases.

Paradise and Portal are mere shells of their former selves. Of Eagle City, but a vestige remains. Galeyville is entirely gone. Charlestown is a sort of gas station, and the great Tombstone, when I was there a month ago, reminded one of a skeleton. The far-famed "Bird-cage" saloon, gambling den and theater, is now being used for a junk-shop, in fact, the only part of the town which is very poignantly alive, that with illusions only, is the graveyard, the Boot Hill of the former outlaws' den of the Southwest.

OVER in New Mexico, near Capitan, county seat of Lincoln County, I lived from 1907 until 1910. I one time met the blind singer, daughter of Pat Garrett, the treacherous, in my mind, sheriff, murderer of Billy the Kid.

They, the old timers, are going mighty fast, though. John Slaughter, one of the outstanding figures of the Southwest, passed this last Winter, and his foreman, his right hand through all the vicissitudes of the past forty years, was killed not long before by Mexican bandits on a raid into the U. S.

R. N. Leatherwood and several others have died here in Tucson within the past two years and it seems as though there are going to be but few of the real pioneers left in another decade.

So it goes, and I want to congratulate Mr. Bechdolt for his accurate accounts, in making permanent the memories of the fast-dying legion.—
R. LYNN WILLIAMS.

THOUGH he coppers his bet a little, Vance S. Bowden is the one of you who has come closest to guessing just what *Charteris* in Robert Simpson's serial, "The Gray Charteris," stands for.

Here's his letter, written to Mr. Simpson:

Dallas, Texas.

In "Charteris" you have created—(or *did* you only paint a living personage?)—a character both tremendously interesting and extremely puzzling. By that I don't mean that his type is non-existent; the species is real enough and, egoist as we all, I read my own spirit into the philosophy of the tale. On one point, though, I'm guessing, and guessing hard. Mr. Hoffman raised it. In fact, he raised quite a bit more discussion than he knew. He put some thousands of us to looking for a more or less negroid gentleman in the fuel-stack; I'll admit he crawled out while I was crawling in, or something. At any rate, I didn't find him. What I'm wondering is, where in Sam Hill is he? Also who, and how, and why?

NOW my idea at first was—hypnotism. I discarded it soon, though. After that I was without any ideas whatsoever. I still am. As Mr. Hoffman said, the story is a good one in itself; still the fact that some underlying thought has completely escaped me leaves a bitter taste. The name applied to *Charteris* in the last four words of the story—The Spirit of Adventure—is not the answer. I succeeded in placing the gentleman in his proper classification early in the story.

Maybe, after all, it's this: *Charteris* is a creation, so far as the man himself is concerned. But he is not a fiction-creature; he's an expression of your wanderlust malady; of my itchy-feet affliction. He's a representative of our uncounted and uncountable tribe, the millions in offices and factories; the thousands in transit; the hundreds and hundreds who have the opportunity and guts to be real *Charterises* in life as well as in heart. Maybe I'm a ribbon-clerk or a soda-slinger, maybe so; the chances are, though, that I've got that germ, in a more or less active form and, given chance, it will take possession of me. *Charteris* represents the perfect type; the beau-ideal of our adventure-hearts.

Do the last four words of the story carry the key? I wonder.—VANCE S. BOWDEN.

Here is Mr. Simpson's own statement of the case:

New York City.

I think Mr. Bowden's letter needs a comment, and the following may be taken as my answer to it:

When Mr. Bowden says *Charteris* is the perfect type; the beau-ideal of our adventure hearts, he says the greater part of what I intended *Charteris* to convey when I built him into fiction. *Fran Goddard's* name for him, "The Spirit of Adventure," is perhaps not quite so definite as it might be, but, to me, *Charteris* represented Adventure itself. He was the embodiment of the spirit of it, as well as of the men who, through all the ages, have searched incessantly in the remote corners of the earth for that intangible something which none of them has ever been wholly satisfied he has found.

IN ADDITION to this, *Charteris* was intended to be something of a *D'Artagnan*, a *Sherlock Holmes*, a *David Livingstone*, a *Daniel Boone*—a mingling of all of the attributes that adventurers, real and imaginary, have been since the world began. His experience is age-old; he fights always for the right because he knows that the right always prevails when the whole story is told; his charity is the charity of man to man; he knows neither race nor creed, and the things that men do, one to another, over all the earth, are no more strange to him, on the banks of the Niger than they would be in Wall Street or the Saltmarket, because he has seen and known all men, and he knows that, wherever they are to be found, in Labrador or Arabia, they are no bigger or better than their heritage of tradition has made them.

Quite naturally, "the road that he travels, he travels alone." Because the way of the true adventurer is a lonely way. Always he is passing on. Where women are concerned he is fascinating but elusive. They have no real or permanent place in his life. Occasionally he meets one like *Fran Goddard*, who sees more clearly than the majority, but the Light blinds and she can not follow.

In conclusion, to the man in slippers, seated by his own fireside, adventure is always spectacular—mysterious—melodramatic. Like *Fran Goddard*, there are many millions of wistful, fireside adventurers who "have always wanted to do things like that"; the spectacular, mysterious, melodramatic things that *Charteris* was required to do, logically and without straining for effect, which the true adventurer is never guilty of, or should not be. And to all appearances, adventure ambles hither and thither, without haste, but ever on the move; hence "the gray man who never hurried."

I think this explains pretty fully just what "The Gray Charteris" was intended to mean, and I should like to thank Mr. Bowden for his generous letter, and for the opportunity he has given me to make the matter clear to *Adventure* readers.—ROBERT SIMPSON.

Now, I leave it to you, wasn't that a case in which we in the office were warranted in giving you a story in which the woman element and the love element played a far bigger part than you like to find in stories in our magazine? I confess I was rather nervous about it. I knew he turned 'em all down in the end, I felt sure you'd agree it was a good story and that *Charteris* was a type you'd like. But you couldn't know in advance that he was going to turn 'em down in the end and I wondered whether at least some of you wouldn't size it up from the first instalment or two as one of those love-tales that end in the usual happy clinch at the end, quit it on that account and upbraid me for printing it. Not an upbraid. Even a large dose of woman-element couldn't spoil your appreciation of a good story. Three cheers all around.

Heard the other day that I'm a woman-hater. Not a chance. No women allowed on our editorial staff. Keep 'em pretty well out of our stories. Yes. But that's only because we need a man's point of view on this magazine and because the large majority of our readers, however much they may like the ladies in real life, want to have our magazine one to which they can turn for relief when they get fed up on love-stories. And we in the office feel the same way.—A. S. H.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure Magazine* by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

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2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.
5. Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

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 39. Baffinland and Greenland
 - 40-44. Western U. S. In Five Parts
 - 45-48. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
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 - Radio
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 - Fishing in North America
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-
- More about Death Valley**
- T**HIS pair of Q's and A's supplements the information given by Mr. Harriman in "Ask Adventure" a long time ago—Mid-March, 1921, to be exact:
- Question:**—"Could you give me any information on Death Valley? Who was "Death Valley Scotty," and where is he now?"—RUSSELL HAWORTH, Parkman, Wyo.
- Answer,** by Mr. Harriman:—Death Valley lies between the Panamint and Pinto Mountains on the west and the Funeral and Amargosa Mountains on the east. It is long, and much of it is below sea-
-
- 1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
 - 3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
 - 5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
 7. Australia and Tasmania
 8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
 9. New Guinea
 10. Philippine Islands
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 - 14-20. Africa. In Seven Parts
 21. Turkey and Asia Minor
 - 22, 23. Balkans. In Two Parts
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 28. Central America
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 - 31-37. Canada. In Seven Parts

level. It is arid, with practically no good water. Any decent water is found in the foothills at each side, as is the mineral. It is the hottest place in Summer known to man. Yet in Winter it is singularly healthful and fine.

A large part of the valley is a borax marsh. Parts of this carry only a thin crust, but in the south the crust is so thick there is a road across it six miles long, on which they haul the twenty-mule loads of borax.

Summer heat runs up as high as 160 degrees, highest on earth. At midnight it often touches 120. The only animal life found in the valley in Summer is snakes and other reptiles.

The gold-mines are in the hills beside the valley, and even there the men can not stay long. They have one farm that raises vegetables for the men at the largest mine. They have sheet-iron fences, high and tight, to break the hot wind. The hens there will climb into the water sprays and stand in water with wings raised. This may read like the pipe-dream of a dope-fiend, but it is a fact.

The hogs, protected by sheet iron, wallow in a water ditch with but their snouts visible. Start a stream from a hose and everything wants to crowd into the stream. Every corral has shower-baths running for the benefit of the cattle and hogs and hens.

Ten minutes on the sand will bake an egg hard. Cut beef in thin strips, dip in brine and hang in the sun. It is jerky within the hour. Alfalfa cut in the field is cured and ready for stacking in less than two hours.

Scotty was a man who found some gold and blew it in an effort to gain notoriety. I don't know where he is now. He may be in — for all I know. He amounted to no more than a bursting bubble.

And now for the second Q. and A. on the same subject:

Question:—"Would you give me all of the information you can on Death Valley, Cal., as to how it received its name, the area and its characteristics, such as: Is it inclosed by mountains? Is it entirely barren? Etc.

Withhold my name if you care to publish this inquiry." — — —, Woodcliff, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Death Valley is so called because in Summer it kills. A man plays out in three Summers, usually. There are a few exceptions, one man having been there six Summers. In Winter the climate is delightful.

There is no good water in the valley proper, though some that can be used. In the hills are springs of good water.

The valley at its lowest point, where the heat is worst, is not more than eight miles wide, from foothill to foothill. This part is exactly opposite the highest peak of the Panamints. Telescope Peak, it is called.

There are two running streams in the valley. One comes in at the north end and forms a marsh, which gives off fumes of sulfureted hydrogen. The other is Furnace Creek, so called because the Mormons built lead-smelting furnaces on its banks in 1857. It rises in the Funeral Range. The creek disappears in the sand shortly after reaching the valley. It is only fifty miles from Mt. Whitney,

the highest peak in the United States, outside Alaska, to Furnace Creek Ranch, 178 feet below sea-level.

The valley is gray and somber. From April to October it is hell. From October to April it averages very comfortable. Then come ducks, geese, quail, robins, blackbirds, lynx, bobcats, rabbits, coyotes, badgers, bats, mice, rats, gophers, skunks and foxes, only to clear out as soon as Summer begins again.

Souse a blanket in a tub of water and pull one end out dripping. It will dry thoroughly while you are scrubbing the other half. Dip a handkerchief in water and hold it up. It is dry in a minute's time. Jump into water fully clothed and you will be bone dry to the last thread in half an hour.

The average humidity of Death Valley is only .01 of 1 per cent.

It sucks the moisture from a man's body fast enough to send him insane in a few hours without an abundance of drinking-water. No man can bear to touch a rock with his bare hand in midday.

The first of many deaths recorded against Death Valley and the one that first gave it the name, was when thirty men, women and children tried to cross it. A dozen escaped alive. Ten years later the bones, wagons, utensils, yokes, chains, guns, revolvers, even children's toys, were found. No rain had fallen on them in all that time. The Piute Indians had left them untouched from superstitious fear.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Palmerston Island

IS IT the "San Pablo" of Magellan, first South Sea island to reveal itself to European eyes?

Question:—"I wish to know the area, population and exports of Palmerston Island.

Also the price of land, if there is land for sale. Prevalence of Solomon sores, elephantiasis, sun-sickness, leprosy.

Approximate cost of living for a white man until he could get a small plantation started to produce something with export value. What restrictions if any on the ownership of firearms?"—L. W. KELLY, Lawrer, Wyo.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—I wonder how you came to hear of Palmerston Island, a dependency of New Zealand.

More an atoll than a real honest, man-sized island, Palmerston has a land area of but one square mile. The atoll lies 273 miles northwest of Rarotonga of the Cook Group. It was discovered by Captain Cook on his second voyage, in 1774.

The land is occupied by the descendants of the late William Marsters, who settled on Palmerston about 1862. Of these, John Marsters acts as resident agent, while six other members of the family help him to make up the island council. The population is about 100.

The Marsters are looking after the planting of the land. It is very fertile. Indeed, the famous navigator, Captain Cook, put into Palmerston on his third and last voyage in order to get fodder for his starving cattle. And Fletcher Christian, along with his mutineers of the *Bounty*, touched there. Because of their unpleasant experiences in Tahiti the mutineers did not care to make Palmerston their home.

Copra—the dried meat of coconuts—and a very small amount of pearl-shell are the principal exports of Palmerston.

There is no land for sale. Nor can it be leased.

One more interesting fact comes to mind. Palmerston is thought by some authorities to be the "San Pablo" of Magellan. This "San Pablo" was the first island discovered in the South Seas.

As for Solomon sores, elephantiasis and leprosy, I don't think they play a very important part in the life of Palmerston. Indeed, I don't think they are to be feared at all. But the weather does get beastly hot.

Revolving Rifles

EVERYTHING, apparently, has been tried out once in the firearms industry:

Question:—"I would request you to advise me whether I am right in believing that some time in the past a make of repeating rifle was manufactured, using for magazine a revolving cylinder as used in the revolver. It is several years since I first started to worry about this point, so that now I do not know whether I imagined this or whether I read about this rifle.

I am certain that I have never seen one, as that I would remember. It appears to me as if such a rifle would have the advantage of being easy to clean and unlikely to get out of order.

There is another point I would like some information about, and that is whether there exists any make of revolver equipped with the straight automatic pistol grip, such as the Colt, Webley & Scott, Savage and practically all other automatic pistols are provided with.

It appears to me that such a grip has many advantages over the usual revolver grip, and as soon as I get a new target pistol I have ordered I am going to try changing the grip.

As I have no American stamps, I am enclosing ten cents in coin to cover return postage on enclosed envelop.

In case of publicity, kindly do not print my name."— — —, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, C. A.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—There have been rifles made in the past few years with a cylinder, similar to the common revolver, but I am not sure where one can now be obtained.

We all know of the old cap-and-ball revolving rifles, made by Colt, Remington, Savage, Warner, etc., but I know of only two makes that were made for fixed ammunition. I can not recall the make of either, if indeed I ever knew it. One was a small cheap affair sold by mail-order houses in .22 caliber only; the other was a carbine, with the same side ejecting-mechanism as the modern Army revolver, and I am under the impression that it was about .44 caliber. The wooden stock was full length, and there were sling swivels.

This rifle was made in Europe for the Mexican Government and was discarded after a trial. They proved unsatisfactory, but one familiar with the Mexican soldier will know that that does not necessarily imply that the guns were worthless ones. I saw them lately advertised by Francis Bannerman's Sons, 501 Broadway, New York.

The Spanish troops of a certain regiment were also armed with revolving carbines of .44 W. C. F. caliber in the late nineties, as a friend of mine told me of seeing them.

As to the automatic-pistol style of grip on revolvers, I know of none. I think you can have one made to please you, however, by some good workman.

I enclose some data that may be of interest.

Working for the South Manchuria Ry.

LIFE in Dairen and thereabout; and a few words on the Japanese as employers of white technical experts:

Question:—"I am an electrical engineer, 37; wife and 3 children—5, 8, 10 years.

I have been approached by certain Japanese interests who are engaging men for a certain line of work in which I have qualified. I have a very good position at present, congenial work and a promising future with the organization to which I am now attached. If I go to Manchuria, my headquarters would be in Dairen; my work would in time cover considerable of south Manchuria.

I have been in a number of the ports of Japan, in Tokyo and made a trip to Nikko, but otherwise am not familiar with their customs. Do not speak their language but would have at least a year in this country to learn, and considerable of my work could be done through an interpreter until I gained sufficient knowledge to go it alone. The salary is attractive and conditions otherwise seem right. We have been a family of wanderers; but my wife and I decided we were through after I came back from 19 months in the service during the war.

We have stayed put for over three years now; and I want to be sure this change is worth while and not follow my impulse, which always urges me to see what lies beyond the next hill.

I would appreciate any advice and information which you may care to offer, as well as an answer to the following questions:

1. What are living-conditions in Dairen; *i. e.*, congenial people—schools—expenses?

2. In what towns along the route of the South Manchuria Ry. could my family live, considering that I could not always be home?

3. What would I find in the way of hunting and fishing?

4. What of the future of this country?

5. Can an American do well and accumulate a reasonable amount of money?

6. How are the Japanese as employers? Would an American be handicapped in doing business with them?

Thank you for your answer.

Name not to be published."— — —, Tacoma, Wash.

Answer, by Mrs. Knudson:—Once in a "blue moon" or so comes a letter like yours—which is a joy to answer because you ask for something definite

and furthermore divulge enough of your personal history so that one can answer you with intelligent comprehension of what you are after. So to it.

1. Dairen is the import and export point for Manchuria and Mongolia, the coast terminal of the South Manchuria Railway, and a free trade port which is clear enough of ice in Winter so that it can be kept open to commerce throughout the year. It has direct steamer communication with our own west-coast ports. There is of course the possibility that it may be, some time in the future, the outlet for Siberian commerce.

It has been developed very rapidly from a settlement of a few fishing-huts to a modern city with a present population of over 200,000. It is without doubt the most modern city—according to our standards—of the Far East.

Dairen, and in fact the entire territory served by the South Manchuria Railway Company, has been and is being administered and developed by that company. And practically all this development work is in accordance with American ideas and standards. Their rolling-stock and rails are American products; a number of American engineers have been employed to direct civic improvements, railway construction, mining operations, etc.; big hotels in this section pattern after our own resort hotels.

The climate is a four-season one, and it gets pretty cold with the prevailing north winds of Winter; but it is a healthy city taken altogether and has modern sewage, water and lighting systems. The S. M. R. has established a finely equipped hospital there. There is a Church of England, I think, and several mission chapels.

Last year's statistics give the European population as about 150. The majority of these are probably Russians. Then there would be a few Swiss, some English and some Americans. You might find at present thirty or forty Americans—perhaps more—and in the near future the American colony will undoubtedly be increased by reason of increasing commercial interests of America in Manchuria.

This colony is made up of the consular force, construction engineers, representatives of various international business houses, and several missionaries. We have always found amongst such colonies in the Far East some very congenial and friendly people.

The matter of schools will be the disadvantage for your family. The S. M. R. has established a good native school system, and English is taught in the higher grades; but these schools are impossible for white children. The Shanghai American School is your nearest hope, and Shanghai is 550 miles from Dairen, but has both rail and water connection. The school has dormitories for 200 non-resident pupils of all grades. Write C. L. Seitz, 6 Kiukiang Road, Shanghai, China, for information regarding tuition, grades, etc.

All told there are something like 1,400 American children in China; and Shanghai draws about 600 of them.

The only other way would be for Mrs. Evans to teach the children, or you might find a chance to unite with one or two other families to employ a governess or tutor; but the latter plans would limit your children for companionship of their own age.

The matter of living-expenses I've considered very carefully because conditions have changed

somewhat since the upheaval of 1914. According to my best judgment, you should be sure of a guaranteed income at least half as much again, and better twice as much, as you can live well upon in this country.

For while certain items of home expense may be less than in this country, you will need to keep up a different sort of establishment to maintain prestige. This may sound un-American, but it is an important thing to be considered in the Far East. Servants—at least a cook and one houseboy or maid—will be quite necessary, and there will be the item of education expense for your children.

If you were alone or just yourself and wife you would not need to be sure of so large an income. But fortunately money seems to come as rapidly as it goes in the Far East—money is "easy" there.

Formerly better-class Chinese homes were rentable for living-quarters; just now commercial activities make it more difficult to secure such quarters. The S. M. R. has erected houses where found necessary for its officials and employees—the style of house fitted to the grade of employment.

One British house, with branches in northern China, is erecting dwellings for its English representatives. Other business concerns will probably follow this example.

2. At present the only towns along the route of the S. M. R. in which are American colonies are Seoul and Chosen, in Korea, and Dairen, Changchun and Yingkow in Manchuria. These would probably be the only places where living-conditions would be right for your family, but there may be Americans in other towns by the time you get there. In these places the foreign settlements usually maintain a club for sociability, and the late afternoon is generally given up to outdoor sports and social doings—if one wishes to mix in.

3. The rivers and lakes abound in fish, as do the coastal waters. The wooded portions of the country support plenty of game. You could find opportunity for all the fishing and hunting you might want.

There are shore and mountain resorts for those of sporting inclination, just as there are in this country, and English-speaking people are apt to congregate at some favorite place. There are two shore resorts within a short distance of Dairen; then there are several hot-springs in the mountains north. At these places it is possible to board at European-style hotels or to rent bungalows.

4. Unlimited possibilities in the future of Manchuria. There are mines, water-power, agricultural districts of wonderful promise, rich timberlands yet to be explored and developed. It is bound, under the present administration, to be one of the great industrial districts of the world.

Write our own Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C. They are keeping tabs on development work here.

5. It seems to me that when you are in Manchuria you are to have fairly thrust upon you numerous good opportunities for investment of both cash and ability; and if your business judgment is good you are certain to make a financial success there.

6. I've known numbers of Americans employed by Japanese, and I think they average up well as employers. I can not see where you might be handicapped, but quite the contrary. They are inclined to look upon American training as to be desired.

If you play the game well with them I believe you

will find they'll do the same by you. In fact I think you will find them rather generous.

However, since you have a family to think of, I'd want my contract perfectly secure from the standpoint of international law. You doubtless have some lawyer right there in Tacoma who can serve you on this point.

Finally—if you have a secure contract with a firm of established reputation; if you feel assured of the right salary to support your family in comfort in the Far East; if you have the ways and means to provide for your children's education—then an opening in Manchuria is about the best sort of opportunity that could fall at the feet of a man of your age in these days, I should say.

Trust this will be of help to you and wish you success in your quest.

Free service, but we don't pay the postage to get it to you.

The Arctic Day-and-Night Myth

MR. SOLOMONS wrecks it; also those two others about Alaska being a two-gun country, and the natives dying young on account of the cold:

Question:—"I am 31 years of age, 5 ft. 11 in. in height, and weigh about 190 lbs. I have had a great desire to visit Alaska for the last ten years. But I never have had the opportunity to meet any person who could give me any information concerning this country.

I therefore trust you will give me general information of what I wish to know.

I have about \$400 cash and \$300 in Liberty Bonds. Is that possibly enough to start from here with?

Is it true Alaska has six months' day and six months' night?

Is there any opportunity for a fellow of my age who is willing to work? Or to get in some kind of business? What kind of business would you suggest?

Is it necessary to always be armed when walking around the different places in Alaska?

Is it true Alaskan people are short-lived through climatic conditions?

As I have stated before all information concerning this country will be highly appreciated by me."—**BRUCE ASCOTT.**

N. B.—Please omit street and city address when answering through *Adventure*. Just the name **Bruce Ascott.**"

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—It will cost you about \$200 to go to Alaska from your city; but pause before going. Better send to the U. S. Geological Survey for general information. It will cost you nothing. Get pamphlets on the general country, and particular ones about the places that interest you. Washington, D. C. That's all.

The six months' day and ditto night is a myth of the geography classes. It is true at the north pole only. Elsewhere it is less and less true as you go south. Only practical difference in central Alaska is that the days are rather short in mid-Winter, but they last all night for several months in Summer, which much more than makes up for it. Yes, there is splendid opportunity for a fellow who will work.

especially if he works intelligently and is willing to stay a few years. It's a fine chance. But if you go, don't let anybody know about the rest of your money. Keep it TIGHT till you are wise to the country and THEN you can use it to immense advantage. Be content to grub along, learning for a year or so. And don't let anybody talk you out of doing what I tell you.

I can't suggest a business. How could I possibly—to a stranger?

No, you don't have to go armed. There are fewer weapons in Alaska per capita than in your city. It's a safe and sane country. Gunmen come only once in ten years or so when there's a sudden rich strike. That sort of thing is out of date, everywhere. Don't let the Wild-West yarns of magazines get a chance at you.

About Alaskans being short-lived—no. Quite the reverse. Sometimes a person dies, though I never knew one to in my ten years there. But it's always from great old age. Sickness is almost unknown.

The Panama Canal

THINK of a dam so big that it can hold back the waters of a lake almost 40 per cent. larger in area than Erie! And anybody who has seen the power of Niagara Falls can begin to realize what that means:

Question:—"I wish to know about the Panama Canal, how they clean it, the length and width?

What do they grow in the Panama Canal Zone?"—**BESS LEGGETT, Menlo Park, Calif.**

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—The length from deep water to deep water is 50 miles; from shore-line to shore-line, is 40 miles.

The bottom widths of channel are as follow:

From Atlantic entrance to Gatun Locks, a distance of 7 miles, 500 feet wide.

From Gatun Locks to Rio Cano is 15 miles; the channel is 1,000 feet wide.

Then for a distance of 2 miles it is 800 feet wide.

Then for a distance of 2 miles it is 700 feet wide.

Then to the entrance to Culebra Cut is 4 miles; the channel is 500 feet wide.

Culebra Cut to Pedro Miguel Locks is 9 miles; the channel is 300 feet wide.

Pedro Miguel Locks through Mira Flores Locks to Pacific entrance, the distance is 8½ miles; the width of channel is 500 feet.

Depth of channel: a minimum of 45 feet throughout, except in Gatun Lake, near the locks, where it is 85 feet deep, and at the Pacific entrance to the Mira Flores Locks, where it varies with the tide. "*Mira*" in Spanish means, "look." "*Flores*" means, "flowers."

12 locks in pair, 1,000 feet, length. 12 locks in pair, 110 feet, width.

Time of transit through completed canal, 10 to 12 hours. Time of passage through locks, 3 hours.

Gatun Lake area, 164 square miles. Gatun Lake elevation, maximum, 87 feet above sea-level. Gatun Lake will impound the waters of a basin comprising 1,320 square miles.

Gatun Dam, length at crest, 1½ miles. Width at base, ½ mile. Elevation at crest, 115 feet above

sea level. Width at water surface, 400 feet. Elevation at crest, 30 feet above Gatun Lake. Width at top, 100 feet.

The spillway is a concrete-lined opening 1,200 feet long by 300 feet wide.

Canal Zone width is 10 miles. Area 448 square miles.

Cost, estimated, for total construction, \$375,000,-000.

The work was begun by the Americans on May 4th, 1904, and was completed for actual operation January 1st, 1915.

The line of the canal goes up the valley of the Chagres River on the Atlantic slope, passes through the ridge of the Continental Divide in the Gaillard Cut and descends to the Pacific down the valley of the Rio Grande.

By building Gatun Dam across the valley of the Chagres, Gatun Lake was formed. It floods a great part of the valley and backs up against the Continental Divide.

The passage between the Atlantic Ocean and Gatun Lake is made by three steps of Gatun Locks. On the Pacific side the passage between the summit level (Gatun Lake level) and the Pacific is made by means of Pedro Miguel Lock, Mira Flores Lake and Mira Flores Locks. A set of three locks to make the whole step at one time would have been built on the Pacific side if it had been possible to secure a site affording a firm rock foundation large enough to accommodate them.

The flights are duplicate (or double-barreled) so that ships may be passed in opposite directions simultaneously.

Many people have an idea that the Panama Canal runs from east to west straight across the isthmus; the axis of the isthmus runs from southwest to northeast. The canal was built from northwest to southeast, almost at right angles to the strip of land, and the Pacific end of it is about 27 miles east of the Atlantic end.

Both entrances to the canal are protected by breakwaters. A thorough system of lights and buoys makes the canal as safe to use at night as by day.

The canal is capable of handling the largest ships now in existence.

It could handle about 48 ships of usual size in a day, or about 17,000 in a year.

The reason for the canal is the reduction it effects in distances at sea. *E. g.*, between New York and San Francisco the distance is 13,135 nautical miles by way of the Strait of Magellan, which by use of canal is reduced to 5,262 miles, a saving of 7,873 miles, equal to three-fifths. From New York to Valparaiso the reduction by canal is 3,747 miles; to Callao, 6,250 miles; to Guayaquil, 7,405 miles; to Wellington, N. Z., 2,493 miles; to Yokohama, 3,678 miles. Nautical mile is 6,080 feet; statute mile is 5,280 feet.

A monument to Theodore Roosevelt will be erected on Ancon Hill looking over the Panama Canal.

A whale ran aground in shallow water inside of the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal, and was killed by machine-gun fire by canal employees, who undertook to salvage it for oil and bone. The whale was too heavy for the 75-ton railroad crane to handle, so a tug attached a cable to the carcass and towed it to a point 12 miles outside of the breakwater, where a naval airplane dropped two bombs weighing 160 pounds each from a height of 1,000 feet, and thus destroyed it completely.

As to the cleaning of the canal. The flow of the water through the locks would keep the locks clean, and the dredging-apparatus takes care of any slides that come in from the banks on the level part of the sea-level sections.

As to what is grown in Panama. All the products of the tropical zone can be raised in that country. The slopes of the mountains are covered with extensive forests. Along the Atlantic coast are numerous banana-plantations.

The list of products is as follows: Bananas, rubber, coconuts, cacao (from which chocolate is made) ivory nuts (for imitation-ivory products), cocobola wood (for knife-handles and such things) hides and skins, mother of pearl, tortoise shell, hardwoods (including mahogany) dyewoods and cattle.

The Seminoles

THEY'RE not one tribe of Indians, as some have thought, but several:

Question:—"I would like to have some information on the tribe of Indians that live in Florida. I forget the name; it's Seminole or something like that.

Tell me something of their life and customs. How are they toward white people?

How is hunting in the 'Glades?

Please don't use my name or address in *Adventure*."

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—The Florida Indians are called Seminoles. There are only a few hundred of them left now, and these are found usually in the Everglades or in the country near by. It would take a book to tell you *all* about them, and I can therefore give you only a sketch. They are much like other Indians in life and customs. They go in hard for beads and bright clothing, are great hunters and trappers, and are nomadic in their habits. Usually they have such names as these: Tom Tiger; Jimmy Jumper; Coffee Gopher; Ben Frank Tommy; Henry Otter; Johnny Lone Palm; Annie Withlacoochee; Mary Long Hair; Jenny Bay Blossom; Lizzie Singer; etc., etc. These names from life.

They are not tidy people, but they will *not* lie or steal. "Injun no steal; but white man steal," they will tell you. Ordinarily they haven't any great respect for whites, though they don't show it. Whites, unfortunately, *do* steal, many of them, and lie too.

In my opinion these Indians have been much mistreated by the whites. But they are not considered dangerous Indians; as a general thing they merely wish to be left to themselves.

Their language consists of a few hundred words. They talk broken English to whites—"S'pec 'um so you tell 'um me no got 'gator hide" is a fair sample of it.

There are several tribes of Seminoles, the most famous being the Tiger Tails, of whom Tom Tiger (whose bones were stolen from his grave for a Northern museum and then stolen back by the Indians) was a great chief, ranking in greatness somewhere next to historic old Billy Bowlegs.

Hunting in the 'Glades proper is not so good as it is in the wild lands adjacent to the 'Glades. Here it is magnificent, but very difficult going, and a guide must be taken along or the hunter is sure to be lost—probably forever. The game is deer, turkey, black bear, panther, bobcat, squirrel, quail, etc.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

The Braw Glen Wharple Heilan' Men

There's a braw fine regiment, as every man should
 ken,
 That deals at the fichtin', an' they clured sicht sight
 o' men,
 An' they sup up muckle whusky gin the canteen
 they are ben—
 The Heilanders o' braw Glen Wharple-O.

Chorus: Braw Glen Wharple Heilan' men—
 The big strong whusky-soppin' Heilan' men—
 The hard-workin', hairy-legged Heilan' men—
Salantie dhu Glen Wharple.

They were founded by MacAdam, wha o' all men
 was the first
 Where they lived in auld Glen Eden, an' they piped
 like they wad burst
 Wi' a kiltie made o' fig-leaves, an' a perfect Heilan'
 thirst,
 Till they stole away the apples frae Glen Wharple-
 O.—*Cho.*

When braw King Solomon was leader o' the clan,
 He'd a hundred thousand pipers, and a host o'
 fichtin' men;
 He kept a grand establishment, as I've no doubt
 ye ken
 For he had a pour o' wives in auld Glen Wharple-
 O.—*Cho.*

When the waters o' the deluge dricket all the world
 o'er,
 The chieftan o' the clan, an' his name was Shan
 MacNoor,
 He bicket up the ship, and he sticket up the door,
 An' he sailed away from auld Glen Wharple-O.—*Cho.*

An' sine he got a corporal, an' goi him find the land;
 He returned wi' an empty whusky bottle in his hand;
 He knew the flood was over; he was fou, ye unner-
 stand,
 When he found a public house abune the water-O.—
Cho.

There's a bonny sicht ye'll mark, when the regi-
 ment's on parade,
 An' the color sergeant's sober, an' the colonel's no
 afraid
 O' seein' tartan spiders crawlin o'er all his plaid—
 They brew awfu' potent whusky in Glen Wharple-
 O.—*Cho.*

There's anither sicht, ye'll mark, sine the canteen
 ye are ben,
 For she wull be awfu' fou o' some awfu' drunken
 men,
 An' a thousand cantie kilties wull gang struttin'
 down the glen,
 For they sup up muckle whusky in Glen Wharple-
 O.—*Cho.*
*(Transcript from Neil H. Wilson, North Tonawanda,
 N. Y.)*

Mrs. E. Marseilles, of 1572 Magazine St., New
 Orleans, wants the words to an old Irish ditty:
 "The Rose of Tralee." Don't knock—walk right in.

One More Day

Only one more day, my Johnny, one more day!
 Oh, come rock and rowl me over—one more day!

Don't you hear the old man roaring, Johnny?
 One more day!
 Don't you hear that pilot bawling?
 One more day.—*Chorus.*

Can't you hear them gals a-calling?
 One more day!
 Can't you hear that capstan pawling?
 One more day.—*Cho.*

Then clap on your long-tailed blue, my Johnny,
 One more day!
 For your pay is nearly due, Johnny,
 One more day.—*Cho.*
 (After each verse the first couplet was sung entire
 as chorus.)

(Transcript from Captain Dingle.)

I would like to get my hands on all the good
 A. E. F. songs that any of you gentle buckaroos
 can remember. There are a lot of poor, slushy ones
 in which mighty few of us are interested. But—
 every now and then along comes a corker like
 "My Billet in Bully Grenay," sent in by compadre
 William D. Lucas of Toronto, which follows. You'll
 agree with me that good stuff like this ought not
 to be forgotten. Lucas says they used to sing it to
 the tune of "My Little Gray Home in the West."

My Billet in Bully Grenay

I've taken a tour through the trenches of France
 And a musketry course on the Marne.
 I've been "there and back" with a ninety-pound
 pack,
 And I've slept with the pigs in a barn.
 I've eaten in *château* and shaved in a church
 And been blessed by a priest every day—
 But I'll never feel right till I get back tonight
 To my billet in Bully Grenay.

The straw in the barn is as soft as a bed—
 It must be nigh twenty feet deep,
 While the rats on the shelves keep themselves to
 themselves
 And allow a poor soldier to sleep.
 Stout Madame Yvonne fries the bacon *très bon*
 While we're sipping her *café au lait*—
 And I'll never feel right till I get back tonight
 To my billet in Bully Grenay!

I know every cottage in Bully Grenay—
 And I know every shell-hole by sight.
 Right over the way is the old *'staminet*—
 There'll be drinks round in Bully tonight.
 So hurry up, train; get a move on again,
 And, driver, don't sleep on the way—
 There are cups to be filled and a calf to be killed
 In my billet in Bully Grenay.

Once in a while I get a line or two from a comrade
 that stirs me to the depths. And when such stuff
 comes sweeping into my limited circle, I simply
 take off my hat, unbutton my shirt, open the

window and mix it with the wind. Believe me, comrades, there never was a cocktail to touch it. Listen to this from compadre George Johnston, a Canadian traveling man who spun it off, including words and music, while waiting for a train in a Canuck town which he makes while on the road:

"I don't know the name of it, and I have forgotten all but a few of the words. It's the music, however, rather than the words, that stays by me—and when I strum the air on the piano now and then, I can close my eyes and see a battered, shell-torn old farmstead in France. It is dusk, with a cloudy sky, so we can light the fire in the brazier without worrying about Fritz and his bombs, and those of us off duty from the guns can sprawl around the grateful warmth. And—then Shorty starts to sing in this thin, sweet tenor, and the rest of us trail along until we have the full harmony:

"Well-a-well-a-well, she am my dusky queen,
Pure as the stars above—
There ain't no gal to ekalize
My Georgia lady-love.

"Well-a-well-a-well, Oh, me, Oh my, Oh, me, Oh my,
dat niggah girl o' mine.
Well-a-well-a-well, well-a-well-a-well, me an' dat
niggah girl o' mine.

"Mighty few words—and most wrong at that. Maybe some of the boys can furnish the correct version."

Come through, comrades.

Comrade R. J. Whitmore, of the U. S. S. *Billern*, now anchored in San Francisco Bay, would like to get the words of an old song, "Casey Jones," a favorite with railroad men and hoboes. Line up, brethren.

Some time ago I sent out an SOS for "The Wabash Cannon-Ball." Comrade J. M. Hogan, 1615 Avenue O, Galveston, Texas, sends in the last verse and the chorus. Maybe some of you boys can dig up the balance. Here it is:

The Wabash Cannon-Ball

Chorus: You listen to the jingle, the rumble and the roar—

As she dashes through the woodland and streams
along the shore.

You hear the mighty engine and the merry hobo's
squall

As he rides the rods and brake-beams,
On the Wabash Cannon-Ball.

Last verse:

New York it is a fine place—

The metropolis of the East.

They have a street called Broadway there,

On which your eyes can feast.

They call it the Great White Way,

Where there's no midnight at all—

You reach it by no other way

But the Wabash Cannon-Ball.

Mrs. Theodore Flagg of Phillips, Maine, would appreciate some one sending her the words of an old song entitled "Up on the Big McGalloway," by Joseph Scott. New to me.

Compadre Harry Martin of 2027 De Rand St., Pittsburgh, has flooded me with a veritable catalog of songs I have never heard. Maybe some of you musickers are familiar with the following list: "Ballad of Denver Dick," "Ballad of the Round County Crew of Kentucky," "The Bride of the Yellowstone," "The Ballad of the Lobster Supper, or the Irishman's Trip to Heaven," "The Ballad of John L. Sullivan and Queen Mary." Some list, comrade Martin—I hope some of us can fix you up.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 30TH ISSUE

Beside the new serial and the three complete novelettes mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE LAST OF THE OPEN RANGES

Cowmen of the Northwest cope with cattle-thieves and horse-rustlers—the "Johnson County War."

Frederick R. Becholdt

THE CASE OF ISRAEL IBN IBRAHIM

The rise and fall of a Tangier money-changer. "Most improbable? But that is often the case with a true thing."

George E. Holt

GAMBLERS' PREROGATIVE

A crook deals—and *Montague* fills a royal flush with the sixth card.

Oscar J. Friend

THE WRECK ON TWO-SISTERS

Salvage extraordinary.

Hubert Roussel

TAMELESS DAYS, A Four-Part Story Conclusion

"Stick up your hands, sir! You are wanted by the Vigilants!"

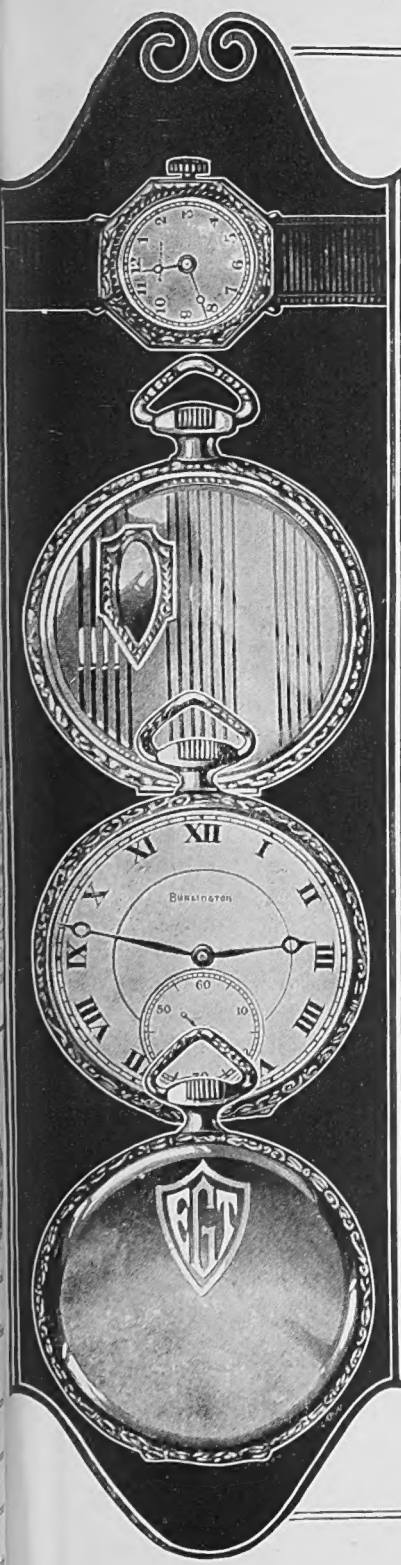
Hugh Pendexter

THE STREAK

The sons of a clannish two-fisted South Seas trader run true to form.

Chester L. Saxby





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*"Was you trying
to hit me
?"*

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For months all the ranchmen had poked fun at *Jersey*, the sick unknown boy from the East who was struggling bravely to get well and earn a living. In time *Jersey* grew strong and when *Tom* sneeringly challenged him to fight—but read the story yourself in

December

Everybody's
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